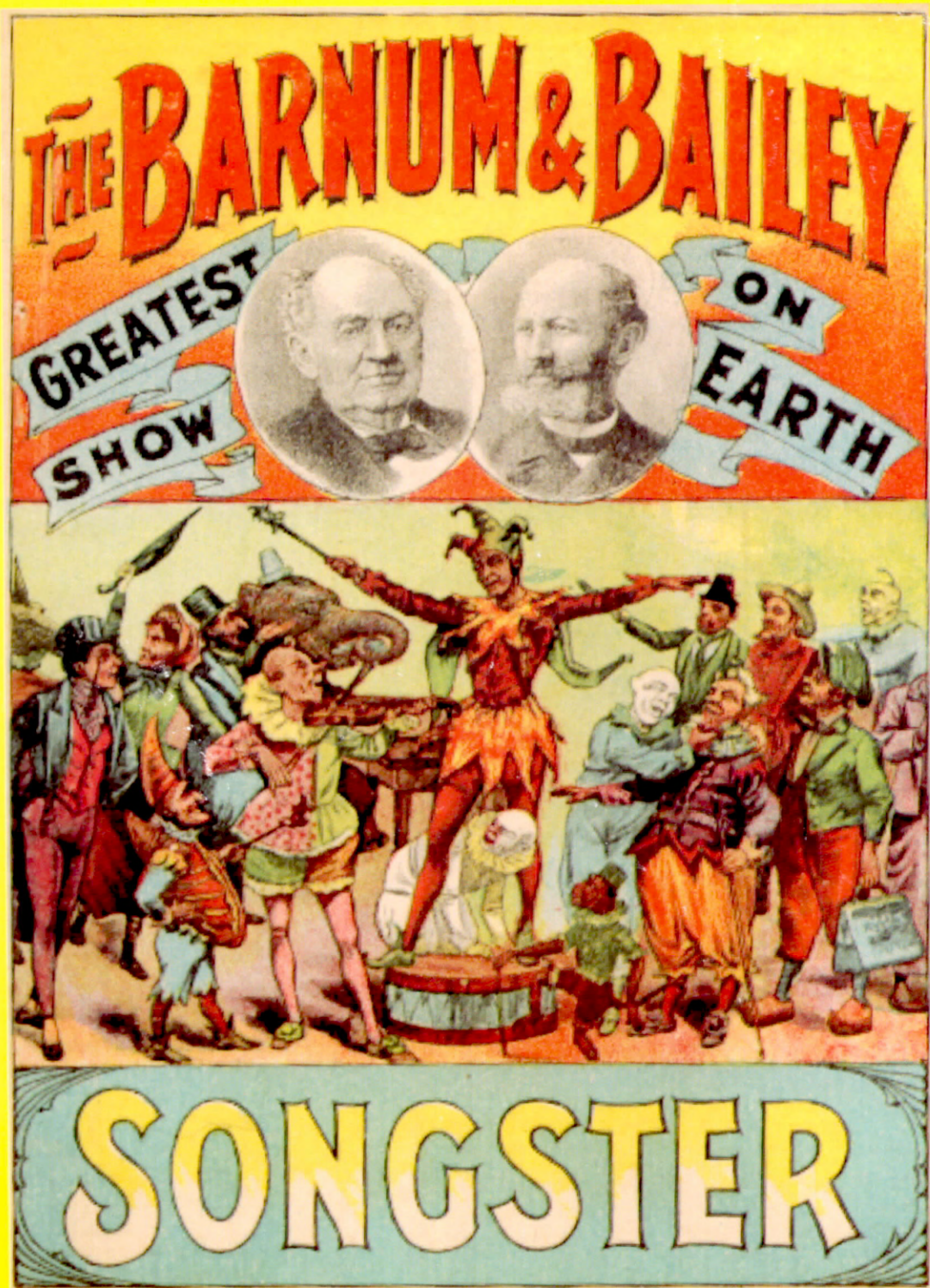


BANDWAGON

THE JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS
HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.

May-June 1999



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THE FRONT COVER

The clown song book on the cover was sold by the Barnum & Bailey Show in 1892. It was registered at the Library of Congress, and Stationer's Hall in London, England.

THE BACK COVER

The cover of the 1885 W. W. Cole's Great Shows courier is pictured on the back cover.

DUES NOTICES

The Circus Historical Society dues and *Bandwagon* subscription notices for 1999 were mailed in April.

Payments for the year starting May 1, 1999 must be received by July 1 or the July-August *Bandwagon* will not be mailed. Send your payment at once. Please check that your name, address and zip code are correct.

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APOLOGY

The Ward Hall interview published in the November-December *Bandwagon* made reference to Dorothy Williams. Ms. Williams was offended by this reference and we apologize to her. Mr. Hall assures her that he will not make further references to her.

CORRECTION

The E. E. Coleman Circus article in the January-February *Bandwagon* stated that John Pluto bought Golden Bros. Circus in 1921. Actually it was 1924.

BACK ISSUES OF BANDWAGON

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The Circus Stake Driver: The Best, Simplest, and Most Economical Machine Ever Invented

PART TWO

By Fred Dahlinger, Jr.

Moeller & Sons/Moeller Bros. and the "Steak" Driver

With the Ringlings trying to perfect their Heiser driver and the Gollmars always improving their homemade driver in the small city of Baraboo, Wisconsin, it is likely that friendly discussions took place between the showmen over the relative merits and problems with each design. One surmises that it was the shop of their mutual cousins, the Moellers, which ultimately became the crucible for merging the best elements of each, with a little Moeller ingenuity thrown in for good measure. Unfortunately, none of the principals in the situation left a memoir which might illuminate the lively exchanges which took place on gray winter days in Baraboo.

The Moellers' circus affiliations commenced in the mid-1880s, when the shop was headed by their father, Henry C. Moeller, Sr. (1828-1908). His two sons, Henry C. Moeller, Jr.

Fig. 24 The first circus stake driver, built by the Moellers for the Ringling show, is depicted in this 1905 Frederick Glasier photograph. John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art.



Copyright, © 1999,
Fred Dahlinger, Jr.



Fig. 23 The Moellers, Henry Sr., seated, with Corwin on the left and Henry, Jr. on the right, are depicted here in 1882, shortly before they entered the circus wagon business. Circus World Museum.

(1868-1957) and his brother, Corwin G. (1872-1946), were brought into the

firm in 1891. They took it over after their father's passing, though he had pretty much turned the business over to them after the turn of the century. Thereafter the firm was styled Moeller Bros. Their substantial brick shop, located on Third Avenue in Baraboo, still stands as part of McGann's Furniture store. Their legacy, in the form of the next generation's charitable fund, still positively impacts the Baraboo community with its support of civic projects.

The Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows was the Moellers' principal account. Commencing in 1884 and continuing through the final Baraboo wintering of 1917-1918, the Ringlings filled the Moeller shop each winter with large amounts of both new construction and repair work. There is even evidence that the Moellers contributed to the Ringling effort after the circus relocated to Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The Ringling brothers repaired

Fig. 25 The second Ringling driver, number 104 of 1907, was notable for being the first built with a rotating deck. Howard Tibbals collection.



their own baggage wagons, but when it came to cages, parade wagons and totally new wagon construction they relied upon their cousins to do the work. The commissions included a big build up for 1903 and another for the reissue of Forepaugh-Sells in 1910. But the Moellers also did work for their other Baraboo cousins, the Gollmar brothers, for whom they built a few new wagons and did extensive repairs some seasons. Their quality work and reasonable prices also earned them jobs from other showmen. They included Ringling-owned Barnum & Bailey (an auto wagon in 1908, four baggage wagons in 1914); Wonenoc, Wisconsin's dapper showman Dode Fisk (a bandwagon, two tableaux, five baggage wagons, a cage and two



Fig. 28 Wear and tear was taking a toll on RBBB number 108 by the time this 1930s shot was taken. Its combined Moeller and Gollmar/Platt heritage is still evident. Circus World Museum.

chariots, 1909); Blue River, Wisconsin's carnival calliope owner Edwin C. Kincannon (a steam calliope wagon, 1911); west coast circus man Al G. Barnes (one baggage wagon in 1913, several cages circa 1921); Miller Bros. and Arlington's 101 Ranch Wild West (stake driver, 1913); five contracts from the highly regarded circus proprietor Charles Sparks (a canvas wagon in 1914; a bandwagon and a tableau, several cages, an air calliope and baggage wagons, in four orders from 1920-1926); single wagon orders from Sun Bros., Andrew Downie and Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey

Combined Shows (a stake driver for each, in 1918, circa 1923, and 1925 respectively); and likely other circus work for which no record survives. They also sold and made ready for the road surplus Ringling wagons, such as those that went to Al G. Barnes (1912, 1917), Fred Buchanan (1912), John H. Garrett (1909, 1913), Tom Wiedemann's Kit Carson Wild West (1912) and carnival owner K. G. Barkoot (1912), to name a few.

It is likely that the first stake driver wagon came from the Moeller shop in early 1904. Its fabrication was the type of challenge which the Moellers seemed to handle with silence and consummate skill innumerable times. Seldom were their achievements documented in local newspapers or trade journals. Whether a vehicle to haul hippos, big top center poles or a steam calliope, the Baraboo builders built them all, successfully and economically. It is likely the Moellers actually developed the basic stake driver wagon design, which was then presented in the late 1904 Bowdle advertisement. Unfortunately, Moeller records for the 1904 Ringling work have not survived, nor has any description of their earliest driver-related work been discovered that would assure them the laurel wreath for the first driver arrangement.

A number of circus fans and historians contacted Henry Moeller, Jr. in his later years to learn about his circus wagon building days. In a July 16, 1950 letter to Harry Simp-

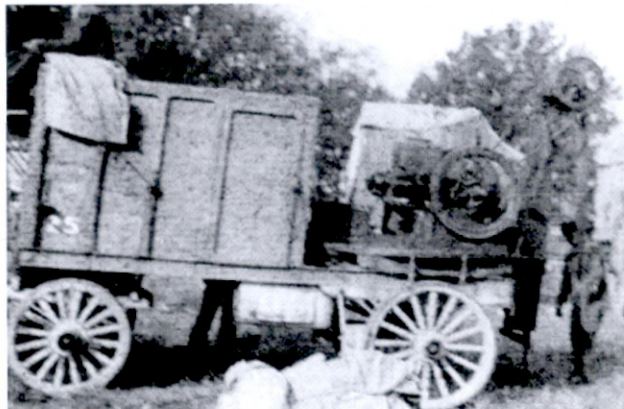


Fig. 26 Originally built for the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells show, number 106 later served on Ringling in 1915 and possibly 1916. Steve Albasing photograph, Circus World Museum.

son, Moeller stated "We also made a Steak (sic) driver for Walter L. Main, Sun, 101 Ranch, Ringling Bros., Gollmar Bros., Barnum & Bailey."²³ Moeller's recollection serves to partially identify their output but does not clarify whether the primary orders for the drivers went to the Moellers, or the Gollmars and William Platt. Adequate photographs and Moeller records survive to confirm Henry's recollection and also clarify the origin of some of the driver orders.

The first Moeller-built stake driver wagon was likely the one outfitted with the original Heiser hammer in 1904. It served on the Ringling Bros. World's Greatest Shows from 1904 through 1906. It is thought that this driver is the one that Frederick Glasier captured on his glass plate negatives, probably when the

Fig. 27 The best of two known views of the Barnum & Bailey stake driver is this 1917 A. L. Chumley photograph. Robert S. MacDougall collection.



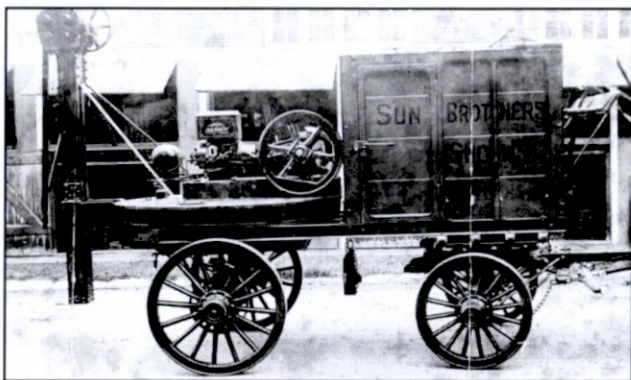


Fig. 29 This photograph of the Sun Bros. driver was taken on Baraboo's Third Avenue, just after it rolled out of the Moeller shop in 1918. Howard Tibbals collection.

Ringling outfit played Brockton, Massachusetts on June 19, 1905. A photograph now at the Circus World Museum of the same machine, circulated by the late Bob Good, is thought to be another Glasier view. These are the earliest known images of a Heiser driver. The photographed machine is so similar to the Bowdle advertisement in all ways that one suspects the sketch was taken from real life. One detail which can be seen in a photographic enlargement of the driver is the friction rollers. They were scored across their face with grooves, an obvious attempt to increase the grip on the hammer lift bar.

The one-cylinder gasoline engine of the 1904 Ringling driver was built by Fairbanks, Morse & Company of

Fig. 30 The operator has just released the raised hammer after his friend has positioned a stake to be driven by the Walter L. Main driver in 1923. Circus World Museum.



Beloit, Wisconsin. Identifiable as one of their popular "Jack of All Trades" models, it was of the external tank cooling type. The vertically disposed engine, likely a four horsepower model, weighed 1150 pounds and the

accompanying water tank held about 55 gallons of water, which added another 460 pounds of weight. Engines with external cooling tanks could run longer and work harder than other models because they facilitated better cooling of the engine components. The engine was just like the one shown in the Bowdle advertisement, again suggesting a source for the drawing.

A March 16, 1907 entry in the Moeller ledgers recorded the \$26.80 of work they did to a stake driver sent to Columbus. The entry suggests that the 1904 Heiser driver was sent to the Ringling-owned Forepaugh-Sells outfit, which wintered in Columbus, Ohio. The hypothesis is confirmed by a note from a March 12, 1907

Baraboo newspaper which stated that the old machine was being sent to Columbus and a new one was being built.²⁴ We are reasonably certain that the same stake driver came back to Baraboo after Forepaugh-Sells operations were terminated at the conclusion of the 1907 tour. There is a \$128 charge in the Moeller books for a Barnum & Bailey stake driver under a February 24, 1908 date. Presumably Moeller repaired the machine before it was shipped east to Bridgeport for further service on Barnum & Bailey, which was then under Ringling command. Otto and John Ringling must have been satisfied with the modified Heiser driver that they had it sent over to their new charge. A 1908 Barnum & Bailey train loading order in the Illinois State University files

gives the driver length as 14 feet. It would have filled one-fourth of a 60-foot flat car, the size then in common use. While back in Baraboo, the driver was outfitted with a new four-horsepower Fuller & Johnson engine. Engine 3147 (order 4531), a standard horizontal unit, was shipped to the Ringlings sometime between February 15 and 20, 1908, in time to be placed on the rebuilt 1904 driver. Vertical engines had quickly fallen from favor for many applications, including stake drivers.

A new driver for the Ringling show, the second from Moeller, was entered on the Moeller books on April 28, 1907. The cost was \$254.17, but that didn't include the engine and the driver mechanism. The engine came from Charles H. Farnum (1864-1916), a Baraboo dealer in gasoline and automobile engines. Engine authority Preston Foster identified the engine as made by the



Fig. 31 This 1916 dated photograph shows the Yankee Robinson driver before it was altered and expanded. Circus World Museum.

John Lauson Manufacturing Co. of New Holstein, Wisconsin, and rates it at about four horsepower. Henry Moeller made this apologetic entry regarding the new wagon in his billing to the Ringlings. "The bill charged to [the] steak (sic) driver which we made [,] \$250.00 [,] seems a bit high[.] [A]bove you will see what the cost of the [steel] stock was[.] [T]here is not much in it but [hope?] the price made will be satisfactory[.] [W]ill ship [it to] you tomorrow, Wednesday, May 1." "Incidentally, Moeller always spelled the word "steak," like the cut of meat.²⁵ It did not take long for the Ringlings,

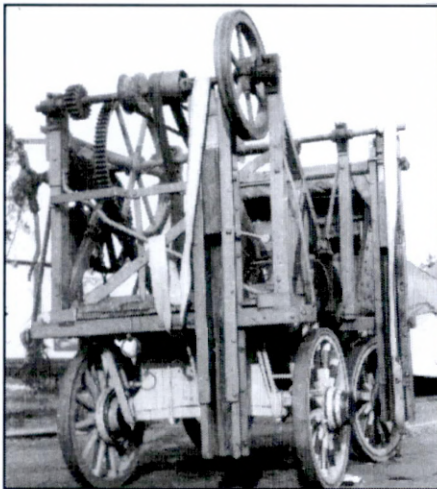


Fig. 32 The 1921 Howes double stake driver was a puzzling tangle of belts and machinery developed out of the Yankee Robinson driver. Circus World Museum.

one of their employees or others to figure out that the stake driving operation could be accelerated if the operator could drive two stakes without having to reposition the wagon. The first major improvement in driver design resulted. In the 1907 Ringling driver, the hammer casing and its prime mover were mounted on a circular deck that could be rotated about a central pivot point on the rear half of the wagon. This enabled the operator to drive each pair of main guy or storm stakes a few feet apart without moving the wagon. Crude open housing bearings or rollers both supported the deck and facilitated the rotation. To maintain the same relative position of the hammer to the ground, a drop frame arrangement was devised, giving this driver a unique appearance. The drop design maintained the same headroom for the front gearing and kept the hammer at the same height from the ground. The drop height equalled the thickness of the rotating deck and its support bearings. In addition to the time saved on driving stakes, the platform could be rotated so that the hammer could be fastened to the wagon side, thereby reducing the loading length of the wagon. The wagon bed had steel channel or beam sills, the first so constructed. An album of 1908 photographs in the Tibbals collection reveals that it was assigned the

number 104. A multiple sprocket and chain arrangement drove the lift rollers and also attempted to keep the chain taut as it wore. Ringling documents recording miscellaneous expenses incurred on the road reveal that the stake driver was being repaired constantly, a few dollars about every other week. Only the steam calliope proved an equal consumer of petty cash. The continuing expense must surely have been an annoyance to management, a burr under the saddle that must have spurred on driver development.

Records of the formation of the 1910 Adam Forepaugh-Sells Bros. Enormous Shows United indicate the show's stake driver was built new by Moeller. It was the third they fabricated. When the 1910-1911 driver was offered for sale in 1912 the dimensions of it were given as 12-1/2 feet long by 5 feet-nine inches wide. Many drivers were about this size, suggesting that an optimum length had evolved. On wagon lists it was not assigned a number but was identified by the work it did, simply "stake driver." The list price, \$400.00, probably represented half of what it cost new. Though the machine was built in 1910, when offered for sale in 1912 it was described as being used only one season. Perhaps a rebuild during the winter of 1910-1911 had a fountain of youth effect. There is no record of it being sold and we think that it was stored in Baraboo until placed on the Ringling show in the mid-1910s.

Though it appears microscopic in the background of a 1911 lot scene, an enlargement reveals the Forepaugh-Sells driver was the first equipped with a rotating deck that was mounted on a straight frame. The concerns about height when the 1907 Ringling driver was manufactured must have been resolved in the intervening years. The arm used by the operator to rotate the deck can be seen in the photograph in the Circus World Museum collections. The driver mechanism was an arrangement of ladder chain and a number of

sprockets, very similar to the 1907 Ringling machine. Each of the three drivers the Moellers built for the Ringling operations was fitted with conventional shoe brakes working on the rear wheels. Four machines which they built in the late 1910s and 1920s were fitted with band brakes, following the Gollmar precedent. There must have been a perceived personal or show preference regarding that aspect of the design.

A humorous aside to the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells driver story survives in the form of a letter from Farnum to the Ringling Bros. dated May 6, 1910. He wrote "Dear Sirs: As requested I have enclosed bill for engine mounted on stake driver shipped yesterday to the Sells show. Henry Moeller kicked a little, said he had troubles enough of his own without OKing some body else[s] bills." Forepaugh-Sells had opened on April 23, which means that Henry and company were two weeks late in delivering the machine. One can imagine Henry's thunder in the Third Avenue shop when the impish Farnum showed up with a Ringling bill to approve.²⁶



Fig. 33 One of the more unusual stake drivers was the one built using parts from a cage wagon on the 1923 World Bros. show. Circus World Museum.

The Moellers probably repaired the 1907 stake driver for the Ringlings on an annual basis. Because their records survive for most of the 1910-1918 period, we know that they fixed it in early 1911, costing \$80.88 on April 20. The work included a new 187-pound hammer, two new friction rolls, five sprocket

wheels, thirty feet of No. 77 sprocket chain, babbitt bearings and so on, nearly a complete replacement of the hammer drive train. The show inventories compiled following Otto Ringling's March 31, 1911 death indicate all three Ringling-owned circuses (Ringling Bros., Barnum & Bailey, and Forepaugh-Sells) had one stake driver, valued at \$300.00 each. All were Moeller-built with Heiser, or improved-Heiser, driver mechanisms.

No Moeller records exist to document Ringling repairs during the winter of 1911-1912, but they did buy a 4-1/2 horsepower engine from the United Engine Company of Lansing, Michigan. The surviving April 16, 1912 invoice places the cost at \$72.00 plus \$3.95 for a "pump jack." A smaller 1-1/2 horsepower machine was invoiced by the same firm on April 16, 1912 for an unknown application. Perhaps the larger engine was placed on a driver.

Stake driver number 104 was rebuilt by the Moellers for \$59.09 before the 1913 Ringling tour, the work completed by April 15, 1913. The chain was replaced again, as was the engine sprocket, and a new box was supplied for the engine. More repairs, at a cost of \$34.50 were entered a year later under a date of April 9, 1914. Moeller used 80 feet of new yellow pine in the body and expended 19 hours on woodworking and metalwork. Thirty feet of #77 chain were again installed, along with friction rollers and babbitt bearings. Ringling winter quarters ledger number 28 contains an entry for "Rep. Stake driver" for \$10.23. Presumably both the Moellers and Ringling shops worked on the driver that year, a situation that could have been an annual circumstance.

The following year, 1915, two Ringling stake drivers went through the Moeller shop, marking the first season any circus carried two drivers. The first was the 1907 driver, number 104, entered on the books on March 14, 1915 for \$40.50 worth of work. The second entry was put in the Moeller ledger by April 5 under the heading "New Steak (sic) Driver" and costed out at \$98.43. We believe that this second driver was the ex-1910 Forepaugh-Sells machine. It

had been in storage at Baraboo for the past few years. The amount and work charged does not suggest an entirely new machine, but a reworked one. Moeller included a \$31.30 billing from William Platt dated April 30, 1915 for work on it. Platt's 52.5 hours of labor were charged at fifty cents per hour, the same rate as Moeller's. Platt also billed for cold rolled steel (probably for shafting), mild steel (housings and fabrication applications), key stock, cap screws and grease cups. The lack of charges from Platt for chains, sprockets and such suggests that Moellers bought them direct and also assembled them.

A Ringling stake driver numbered 106 is shown in a photograph taken by Ringling employee Steve Albasing, a wardrobe department worker who used the aliases John Heck and "101" Heck. He was with the Ringling outfit only from 1912 to 1917. We are of the opinion that number 106 was the Moeller-built 1910-1911 Forepaugh-Sells driver and that it had been stored until placed into Ringling service in 1915. We believe that it served as number 106 in 1915 and possibly 1916. These are the only years in which available facts support the presence of such a driver with that number. Both it and the bent frame Ringling driver numbered 104 had very similar drive systems utilizing sprockets and ladder chain, as stated previously. The shared design is further proof of use at the same time.

After Al Ringling's January 1, 1916 passing the Ringlings again compiled inventories of their show assets. There was a #104 driver (built 1907) on Ringling valued at \$300 and another on Barnum & Bailey (built 1904) worth \$350. The second Ringling driver, the 1910) was excluded from the evalua-



Fig. 35 The Robbins Bros. unique stake puller of 1930 is in the foreground, with the show's stake driver barely visible in the right background. Circus World Museum.

tion. It may have been omitted if the Ringlings reverted back to just one driver for that season, the inventory not including any stored or surplus assets. On April 8, 1916 the Moellers noted a repair bill of \$36.11 for a single Ringling stake driver. The expected repairs, sprockets, chain, rollers and a new 142 pound hammer, are all listed.

We believe that the Moellers built two substantially new drivers for 1917, number 101 at a cost of \$247.00 and number 104 at a cost of \$420.50. Moeller work records reveal that an "All new driver belt" was included with each, confirming that a belt, and not chain, drive was used. The change recognized the superior Gollmar belt design as compared to the Heiser ladder chain system. Only number 104 received a new engine, meaning that one older engine was reused in the reconstruction of number 101. We believe that number 106 was utilized in one of the new driv-

Fig. 36 One of the most compact drivers was with the 1931 Robbins Bros. outfit.





Fig. 37 The vertical mechanism on the driver platform is the puller mechanism that was part of the Sparks Circus in the late 1920s. Circus World Museum.

ers, presumably number 101, the one that cost less. Likely the engine, steel frame, undergear and its distinctive wheels were salvaged and reused. The new construction rendered driver number 104 (1907 vintage) as surplus. This unique drop frame driver remained intact and was sold to Al G. Barnes in 1917.

Barnes was no stranger to buying Ringling surplus. In 1912 he purchased five former 1910-1911 Forepaugh-Sells wagons via Henry Moeller. After the Barnes outfit played Baraboo on August 10, 1917, *Billboard* (August 25, 1917, p. 29) reported that the showman bought several new Moeller wagons. There is no order for Barnes wagons in the Moeller ledgers, which do survive for that year. More than likely the date marks when several surplus Ringling wagons, including the #104 Ringling stake driver, passed via Moeller to Barnes. A listing of only two stake driving men in the 1923 Barnes route book documents that there was a mechanical driver on the property by that season. The dearth of Barnes documents and photography for the 1917-1925 period limits our ability to confirm the transfer earlier. The ex-Ringling drop frame driver remained substantially intact except for the chain drive arrangement, which was converted to a dual

belt drive by 1928. By 1929 it was assigned the number 10, which it carried thereafter. Sometime before 1931 it was retired to the Barnes quarters in Baldwin Park, California. A defunct stake driver, either this one or the one that replaced it for 1931-1934, could still be seen there in 1938. Surprisingly, the offset frame design was retained in the replacement Barnes driver, a throwback to an interim and superseded design that was two decades old.

A 1917 photograph of the Barnum & Bailey driver shows that it was then assigned the number 25. It was still a single hammer machine with the friction rollers driven by ladder chain, but it had been retrofitted with a steel frame, a larger stake box, a rotating deck and a horizontal engine. Very little of the original 1904 Ringling driver remained in it. The hammer casing was still eccentrically mounted to the right rear position, reflective of its earlier heritage. The age of the driver and the old style ladder type chain on it explain why it was relegated to storage after the 1919 merger. Its ultimate disposition remains unresolved.

The last Moeller-documented Ringling repairs came in the spring of 1918, when the "Old Steak (sic) Driver" received \$34.23 worth of work. We interpret this to mean number 101. If number 104, the more completely new of the two 1917-built drivers, needed attention it was presumably provided by Ringling workmen.

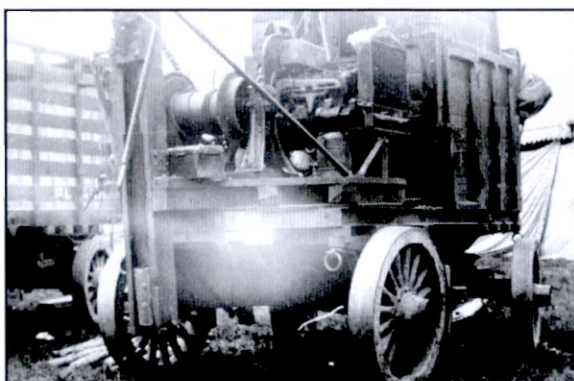
The Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Combined Shows (RBBB) inventory compiled after Henry Ringling's October 11, 1918 death confirms that two drivers (numbers not given, but assuredly Ringling 101 and 104 of 1917) were on the combined show, valued at \$300 and \$200 respectively, and that driver number 25 from Barnum & Bailey remained at the Bridgeport quarters. The two

Gollmar/Platt-design drivers on RBBB in the early 1920s, assigned numbers 154 and 155, were the two drivers built in 1917. One appears in a 1918 Ringling photo printed in the November-December 1995 *White Tops* (page 21). Both were powered by engines from the Banner Engine Company of Lansing, Michigan by the mid-1920s.

Moellers furnished a new stake driver to RBBB for 1925, the last one built in Baraboo. The mechanism was fabricated by William Platt. It was also the last driver job known to have been accomplished by Platt and was a subcontract from the Moellers. Platt billed them \$415.00 on June 9, 1925 for "Making Stake drive (sic)." The work was finished on February 20 but for reasons unknown the billing was not sent until several months later. The driver engine came from the Stover Mfg. & Engine Company of Freeport, Illinois, which had furnished a similar four horsepower engine for driver application previously. It cost \$175 with either a Webster or Wico high tension magneto, minus a 40% jobbers discount.

Likely in 1925, certainly by 1927, RBBB was using three stake drivers, the first and only circus to ever carry three wagon-mounted drivers, all single hammer, rotating deck machines. Likely they were the two 1917 machines and the one from 1925. The three were reassigned numbers 106, 107 and 108 by 1927 and all had 15 to 16-foot loading lengths. A rebuilding program must

Fig. 38 Between the hammer and the engine of the Sparks driver was the cable spool that worked in conjunction with the stake puller mast. Howard Tibbals collection.



have been undertaken shortly thereafter, as the 1932 RBBB loading order specifies lengths of 12 feet for the three drivers. Within a few years they lost most of their Moeller-built, and Gollmar/Platt design, physical characteristics. Their subsequent years will be covered in a later section.

The Moellers built three stake drivers for other shows. The Miller Bros. & Arlington 101 Ranch Wild West bought one for 1913. The Moellers received \$850.00 from George Arlington for it. Arlington later wrote them "the stake driver is working very nice, and the wagon is made in an artistic manner, and we appreciate it very highly."²⁷ The driver mechanism failed before the first season was finished. In the Moeller papers is an invoice dated June 10, 1913 from the W. A. Jones Foundry and Machine Company of Chicago for sprockets and two types of chain, #0316 interlocking riveted pintle chain and #77 chain. These were to be expressed to the 101 Ranch show at Boston, suggesting a premature failure of the driver. A film of this driver in operation is preserved in the Library of Congress. The existence of this piece, the earliest known film of mechanical stake driving, was discovered by John F. Polacsek. The driver was included in the chattel of the former 101 Ranch property when it was offered for sale by Ray O. Archer of Jacksonville, Florida via an ad in the January 18, 1919 issue of *Billboard* (page 66). The former Ranch property was sold piecemeal and the ultimate disposition of the Ranch driver is unknown.

A newly-built Gollmar/Platt design stake driver was furnished to the Sun Bros. Circus, likely in mid-1918. It was fitted with a five-horsepower, horizontal, hopper-cooled engine made by Banner. The engine, with a Web magneto, cost the Moellers \$107.77. A Sun Bros. sale ad in the November 9, 1918 issue of *Billboard* (page 26) described it as "used two months." No doubt the Moeller device went to another circus after the limited use with Sun Bros.

A similar driver was built by Moeller for Andrew Downie's Walter L. Main circus sometime between 1918 and 1923. Photography places it



Fig. 39 William H. Curtis was a fighter of elements and men. Here he strikes a fearsome pose, leader of the unbeaten canvas gang of the 1905 John Robinson outfit. Circus World Museum.

on the show in the latter year. The horizontal gas engine on the driver was made by Stover and was of the hopper cooling type. The Main show was a 15 to 18-car circus that became the basis of the 1925 Miller Bros. 101 Ranch Wild West. The disposition of the driver remains unknown. A photograph in the Mack Truck Historical Museum collections suggest that it may have been retained by the Millers and used on their 1925 show. A different driver was on the Ranch operation by 1930.

Beyond inquiries from circuses, there was interest in the Moeller stake drivers from people outside the business. A representative of the Patton Coal & Mining Company of Frontenac, Kansas saw one on the Ringling show about 1913. After asking at the Ringling office wagon about it, S. J. Patton was told to contact the Moellers, which he did by letter on January 15, 1914. He wrote "As we are in the Steam Shovel Strip [mining] business, we are of the opinion that the above [Ringling stake driver] machine would be just the thing to be put in use for driving coal pins, for the purpose of wedging coal, and ask you to kindly give us your opinion on same, also advise if this machine can be run by electric instead of gasoline, also send us cuts, all necessary information, and quote

us your prices on same." We don't know if Henry Moeller ever answered Patton's many questions, but he did save the inquiry.

Fred Buchanan's Stake Drivers and Puller

While the multiple hammer stake driver is generally associated with Cap Curtis and the American Circus Corporation shows, an example has been found of a double driver on Fred Buchanan's Yankee Robinson Circus of the late 1910s which anticipated its development. The driver was the first of three claimed technical innovations on Buchanan's outfit. In 1919 he attempted to fabricate seat wagons and devised a canvas spool, but the former were not successful and the latter was never constructed, according to William H. Curtis.²⁸

Within the next decade, Buchanan would also arrange for the first independently mounted stake puller to be fabricated. Buchanan's first machine was perhaps the most unique driver in the history of the circus, incorporating several unusual elements. A single photograph suggests that it was with Fred Buchanan's Yankee Robinson Circus by 1916. A report in the April 21, 1917 issue of *Billboard* (page 26) declares that it was perfected by that time. As originally built, it was a single hammer machine that utilized both a fabric belt and open gearing to achieve the power transfer from the engine to the hammer lift rollers. The 1917 account also claimed that it was both a driver and a puller, with the capability to pull out seven stakes per minute. The last 25 pulled at night were intended to be loaded on the wagon so that the driver could start work in the morning before the later arrival of the stake wagon. The device represented the combined efforts of Charles Kelly, Ross Ashcraft, Sam Smith and Dick Stevens, none of whom are well known in circus history. They were likely show workers who were permitted to let their inventive talents produce something. It was said that they obtained a patent on their creation, but no record of it has been found.

By 1919 an enterprising mechanic made a double out of the original

Robinson machine by mounting a second driver at the mid-point of the right side of the wagon frame. While being the first double driver mounted on a wagon, it also anticipated the location of a third hammer which Curtis would add some years later in the same position. While in a single position, two men could simultaneously drive a stake, one in the outer oval of stakes and another in the inner.

The method by which stakes were pulled has not been determined. A single photograph shows a wire rope and pulley arrangement that may have been the heart of the system. Perhaps to lend necessary strength, a roof structure was installed later, possibly in anticipation of the box structure which would later characterize Curtis' triple hammer drivers.

The Robinson driver, sans roof and pulley apparatus, passed from Buchanan's ownership to that of Jerry Mugivan (1873-1930) and Bert Bowers (1874-1936) during the winter of 1920-1921, when the Yankee Robinson property and their Howes Great London railer were merged into one circus at William P. Hall's Lancaster, Missouri farm. It remained within their ownership for at least the 1921 season and then disappears from the record. An excellent close-up of the rear of the wagon in 1921 shows that a belt was actually affixed to the hammer weight and that somehow the belt was used to lift the hammer. Exactly how this was done has not been determined. It appears that the belt was partially wrapped around a small diameter shaft. When the operator established tension on the belt, the friction between it and the shaft increased, causing it to seize and move with the shaft. This caused a lifting of the hammer until such time as the operator eased off his tension, allowing the belt to slip and the weight to fall. Fabric belts moving at speed and under load are never safe to be around and perhaps this condition made it a quick candidate for retirement before it claimed any lives or limbs.

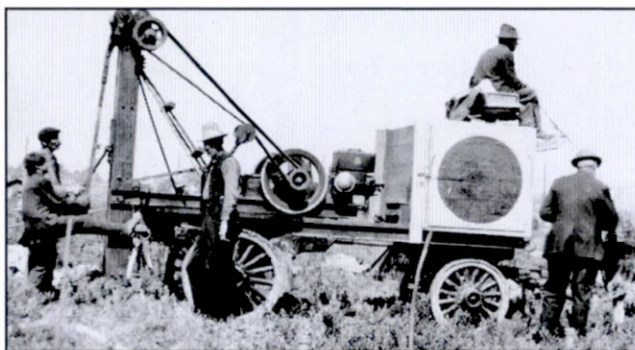


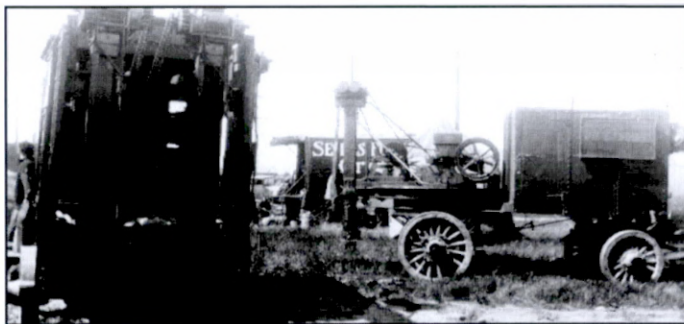
Fig. 40 The operator of the 1915 Sells-Floto driver had his leg lifted in a position characteristic of the operation. It gave him a little extra edge when lifting the lever. Pfening Archives.

Fred Buchanan's 1923 World Bros. show had a driver that appears to have been made from a cage wagon, with the engine placed in a barred area. It may have been another of Buchanan's attempts to develop something from nothing on a limited budget.

Buchanan apparently realized adequate benefits from his earlier combined driver and puller as by 1927 his Robbins Bros. outfit was equipped with both a stake driver and a stake puller. Both wagons are shown in two poorly exposed train photographs taken at McCook, Nebraska on August 12, 1927. The driver was a single hammer rotating deck machine, similar to Gollmar/Platt and Moeller-built drivers. Likely it was purchased second hand, perhaps being one of those that cannot be traced away from another show.

The puller was photographed

Fig. 41 A Curtis rebuilt single, complete with chain drive and stop plate, sits adjacent to another Curtis invention, the triple, on Sells-Floto in 1931. Pfening Archives.



again at Elgin, Illinois on May 26, 1930. To the best of our knowledge, it is the first puller to be independently mounted on its own wagon. To a limited extent it resembled the Yankee Robinson combination driver/puller, suggesting that the earlier device may have inspired the latter. Painted on the side of the wagon

was the identification "stake puller," enough to clearly establish its purpose. Short in length, perhaps no more than 10-feet long, it was powered by a horizontal gas engine. It drove a fabric belt that connected to a shaft and gearing operation. Unfortunately, the photograph is taken from the left front of the wagon, concealing the actual pulling apparatus from view. Both belting and chain can be seen in the view, suggesting that a chain was attached to the stake in the conventional manner, with belting being spooled on a take-up drive of some sort to actually perform the extraction.

For unknown reasons, a different stake driver was on the 1931 Robbins show. This one had an overhead frame arrangement to increase the rigidity of the hammer support. The size suggests that it may have been fabricated using the 1927-1930 puller wagon as a basis. None of the Buchanan machines can be traced away from either his Granger, Iowa winter quarters or William P. Hall's Lancaster, Missouri farm, the repositories for the Robbins equipment after a retrenchment in 1930 and the final closure in 1931, respectively.

Charles Sparks' Stake Driver and Puller

A compact single rotating hammer machine, number 9, was with the Sparks Circus, from circa 1925 through the final season of 1931. It first appears in a Sparks train photograph that may date as early as 1925. A vertical extension to the stake box, to increase stake-holding capacity, had yet to be added when the view, in

the Circus World Museum collections, was taken. Other photography documents its existence in 1926 and 1927. One 1928 wagon list establishes the wagon length at twelve feet. The most surprising aspect of it is that it was not a Moeller machine. Moeller built more wagons for Charles Sparks (1882-1949) between 1920 and 1926 than for any other

circus, some, it has been claimed, as a result of the intervention of Charles Ringling. Their output for Sparks, which is well documented in the surviving Moeller papers, fails to make any mention of a driver. One is left to conclude that it may have been devised by the show's wagon master and fabricated at the Macon, Georgia winter quarters.

The lack of knowledge about the Sparks stake driver origin is unfortunate because it is the only combination driver and puller clearly depicted in photography which permits us to understand the pulling operation. The hammer operation was the Gollmar style, with two levers. The prime mover was an in-line engine, such as those made by Waukesha. Power was transmitted to the contact rollers via a chain in the conventional manner.

The puller mechanism consisted of two parts, a lift frame and a wire rope drum. The lift frame was mounted on the rotating platform, 180 degrees opposite from the hammer casing. It consisted of a fixed vertical mast within which a lift arm could swing from a near horizontal to a raised position. The drum was nestled between the engine and the hammer. It was also driven by a chain connected to the auto engine. It is unclear if there were clutches or other power transmission devices between the components to assure that only the proper device was being powered while the other sat idle. The wire rope came over the top of the fixed mast and down to the moving arm. A hook at the end of the rope engaged the chain, which was wrapped around the stake in the normal manner.

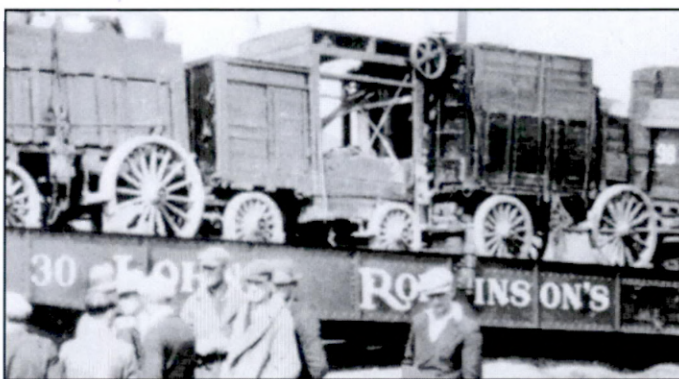


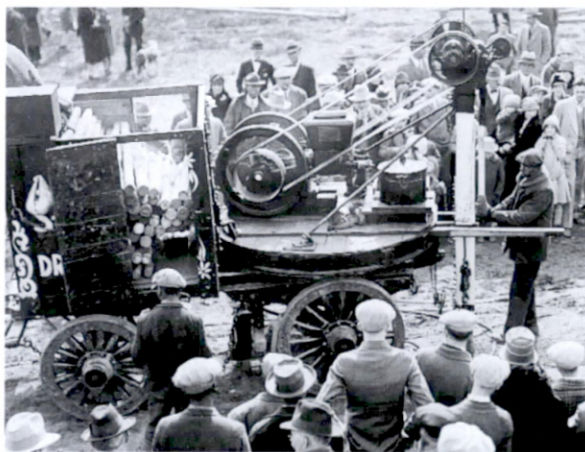
Fig. 42 The first Curtis triple to be photographed was the 1928 John Robinson machine. It was rebuilt after this photograph was taken. Al Conover collection.

Energizing of the rope drum raised the moving arm, extracting the stake from the ground. It was a simple operation and must have proven effective. Perhaps it was the first really successful wagon-mounted stake puller. The novel Sparks driver was stored at RBBB's Sarasota winter quarters after the final 1931 tour and was likely destroyed along with other Sparks property to bring certain IRS actions to a close.

William H. "Cap" Curtis and The Triple

One of the very select number of individuals who could properly be called a "circus engineer" is William Hanford "Cap[tain]" Curtis (1873-1955), a man modestly termed "The Edison of the Circus" in the 1915 Sells-Floto Circus program.

Fig. 42-A A single driver on Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1927. Pfening Archives.



Unique among those who filled the same positions as he did with great circuses, Curtis used his knowledge and authority in a progressive way. He designed and implemented new technology for the circus, improving upon existing show properties and practices. Thereby he lessened the burden on

the show's workingmen while assuring that the performance engagements could be met with greater assurance. He developed the "Curtis [cable] Truss System" as a replacement system for troublesome toe pin-type seat stringers (1906; also called "Gravity Lock Seat"); designed the first canvas spool wagon (1910-1911); erected four big top center poles simultaneously (1913; six at once in 1914); put the first motor truck on a circus (1915); designed the first mechanical seat wagons (1915); developed an automatic tongue latch for wagon poles, and possibly poling chains; conceived a guy-rope tightener (by 1923); devised a canvas wagon loading derrick (by 1931); and constructed some of the most ruggedly-built baggage and cage wagons, "Curtis Wagons," ever to travel with any show. That's a record without equal in American circus history.

Just as he was renowned for his ingenuity in fighting the physical battles of moving the circus, Curtis had an equal reputation as a fighter of men. Jake Posey (1863-1962) was with him on the Bob Hunting Circus about 1894/1895, where the twenty year old was known as "Billy the Kid"

for his pugilistic skills. His gang of canvasmen on the 1905 John Robinson Circus were reportedly never bested in a fight by any crowd of town toughs. Perhaps Courtney Riley Cooper captured the essence of Curtis best in his book *Under the Big Top*. He quoted Curtis (page 226) as saying "You see a fellow stays in the circus game because of the spirit of combat that's in him. It's a life where you don't know what you're going up against from one day to the



Fig. 43 Here are the two triples of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus in the 1930s, at rest after having completed the day's duties. Pfening Archives.

next, a constant fight against time and against the elements. It means a lot to a fellow to know he can do the impossible." Maybe when the circus was running smoothly Bill went out and found a fighting challenge of the human type. Curtis expressed himself in a different way on his headstone. His epitaph there reads "After 58 years with circus I can take anything from now on."

In his long circus career he had served on the best, biggest and most lauded of shows. He became a boss canvasman by the age of 20 or 21 and subsequently filled that role or the position of general superintendent on all other shows with which he associated himself. He must have loved the business because Cooper said he was making \$75 to \$100 a week when mechanical firms were offering him \$15,000 a year to leave the road. His record of employment by 1900 included Charles Andress (1889?-1890), W. H. Harris

Fig. 44 Ed Kelty made this fine photograph of the Curtis triple that was on Sells-Floto. The massive construction of the machine is evident in this view. Pfening Archives.



Hamilton & Sells, J. H. LaPearl, Sipe, Dolman & Blake (1898), W. B. Reynolds, John H. Sparks, M. L. Clark, Harry Long, and Sells & Gray (1900). The frequent shifts may have been the result of either fighting, a disregard for authority or a drifter's mentality. After the turn of the century he settled down, doing stints with the original John Robinson outfit (1901-1907?), Coney Island Hippodrome Company (1908), and then Tammen & Bonfils' Sells-Floto, where he held sway from 1909 to 1916.

Curtis moved to Ed Ballard's Hagenbeck-Wallace in 1917. There he survived a severe leg injury that left him with a limp, the loss of his diamonds and \$8,000, his life savings, in the horrific wreck of 1918, and then stayed with it through the ownership change to Mugivan and Bowers until about 1928. He was possibly with the Corporation's John Robinson show in 1929 and then shifted to Sells-Floto for 1930-1932, which included the great Tom Mix seasons. By then a Ringling organization employee, he laid off the season of 1933 at Chicago's Century of Progress before shifting to Al G. Barnes for 1934-1936 and to Barnes-Floto for 1937-1938. He then took over duties on John North's RBBB for 1941 and 1942, followed by the seasons of 1943 to 1947 with Zack Terrell's Cole Bros. operation. When Curtis wasn't battling for the circus, he was growing pecans on his Mississippi farm.²⁹

Curtis' skills as a wagon designer and builder resulted in his working the winter season for a circus other

Nickel Plate, Gentry Bros., Sells Bros. (1893), Walter L. Main, Adam Forepaugh, Pawnee Bill, Bob Hunting (1894-1895), Forepaugh-Sells (1896), Great Wallace, Hummel,

than the one that hired him for the summer. He was regarded as something of a "heavy-hitter" when it came to such work. Though he was the superintendent of the Denver-based Sells-Floto outfit at the time, Hagenbeck-Wallace hired him during the winter of 1915-1916 to fabricate a set of seat wagons for the West Baden, Indiana show. After he became an American Circus Corporation employee, each winter he worked to upgrade the wagon fleet of one of their three great 30-car shows, giving him more practical circus wagon experience than perhaps any other man in the world.

An article published in the September 1931 *Popular Mechanics* suggests that Curtis first became involved with stake drivers about

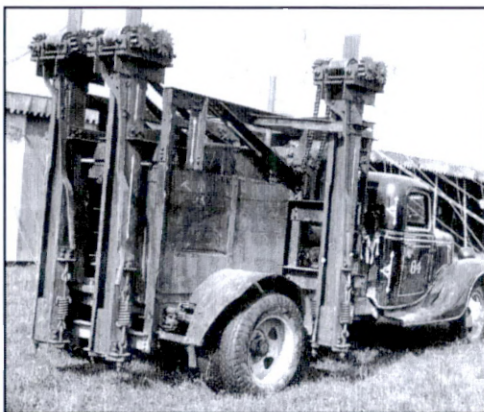


Fig. 45 It has been claimed that the Tom Mix triple was made from the Sells-Floto driver. It was the only such device ever with a truck show. Robert S. MacDougall collection.

1916, when he was boss canvasman with the Sells-Floto circus. We don't know how early that Tammen and Bonfils-owned enterprise had a stake driver, but a photograph places one there in 1915. We suspect that Curtis may have built it himself, possibly with the knowledge of other machines then in use. It was a Gollmar lever type machine, light duty by Curtis' later standards. Driven by a fabric belt, it has some unique characteristics, such as a belt tensioner, which suggest a Gollmar-inspired machine. The prime mover was a horizontal gas engine with dual exhaust ports, furnished by the National Supply Company of Toledo, Ohio. This circa-1915 drive

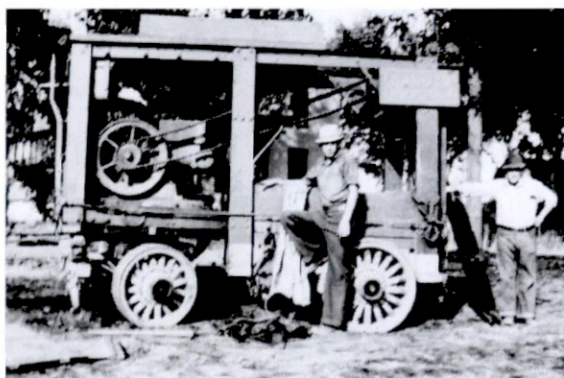


Fig. 46 The left side view of the Barnes triple shows the chain connecting the engine to the shaft that drove the friction rollers. Pfening Archives.

shows in a 1918 photograph taken at Horton, Kansas, in which it has a rotating deck positioned sideways on the train. A Gollmar-design machine replaced it sometime after Curtis' departure from Sells-Floto no later than 1921. In an unpublished commentary from the late 1940s, Curtis noted "In the original invention, a long fiber belt between the engine and the weight caused much lost power. I've stopped that loss by substituting chains and adding extra gear. Two men and a team can drive six hundred stakes a day, and machinery never tires no matter how tough the ground may be. My rough necks do drive some storm stakes with sixteen-pound hand sledges

Fig. 48 This is the first triple owned by the Cole show, depicted in a 1935 Walt Tyson photograph. It was lost in the 1940 Cole winter quarters fire. Circus World Museum.



but it's our mechanical stake driver that helps the show move on schedule."³⁰

Courtney Riley Cooper's *Under the Big Top*, written about 1919-1920, mentions "the Curtis stake driver" (page 226). We are at a loss to explain the

specific characteristics of this device. Whether it was the circa 1915 Sells-Floto driver or another improved machine is unknown. In an October 11, 1949 letter to George L. Chindahl, Curtis claimed he was the first to make a driver that drove two stakes. He may have been involved with the 1910s Yankee Robinson driver in this regard, but proof is lacking.

Curtis viewed Buchanan's seat wagon venture as an infringement on his own patent, but perhaps it reflects some association between the two men. Possibly that was the innovation inferred by the "Curtis stake driver." Unfortunately, we know of no newly-designed dual Curtis driver of any configuration.

With Curtis himself making the claim it should carry some merit; we only wish that he had explained the claim further. Perhaps it was only a short lived trial, causing him to mention it only in passing.³¹

A 1925 photograph shows Curtis personally placing one of two dual belts in place on the modified Gollmar driver on Hagenbeck-Wallace. This may have been the first time such an arrangement was placed on a driver. Dual belts lessened the power loss, from slippage, incurred with a single belt, even if a tensioner was used. Later, the Barnes show had dual belt drives on their driver in 1931. There are photographs from 1927 onwards which show his

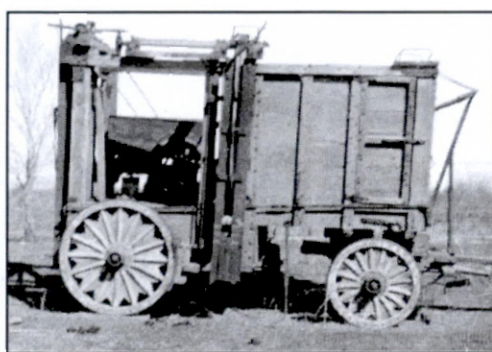
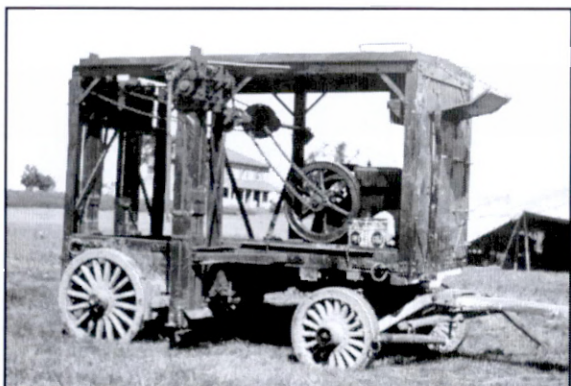


Fig. 47 One of the more obscure triples built was with the 101 Ranch wild west troupe. It is shown here about 1931, after the show ceased operations. Pfening Archives.

retrofitting of chain drives to the rebuilt Sells-Floto driver, and by 1930 on John Robinson. Curtis used motorcycle-type chain, a much better choice than the earlier ladder chain. Each change was an incremental improvement over previous designs. None could be too great a change or be too great a risk to succeed, as the show still had to rely on the driver each and every day of the season.

One of the other driver enhancements which can be seen on Curtis-built machines was the addition of a retainer to the bottom of the hammer casing. This stop plate, restrained by several heavy springs, prevented a hammer weight from accidentally falling all the way down, onto the ground. Such a circumstance might have happened more

Fig. 49 New in 1937, the second Cole show triple was considerably modified by the time it was photographed in 1947. The machine still had a mesmerizing effect four decades after its debut. Circus World Museum.



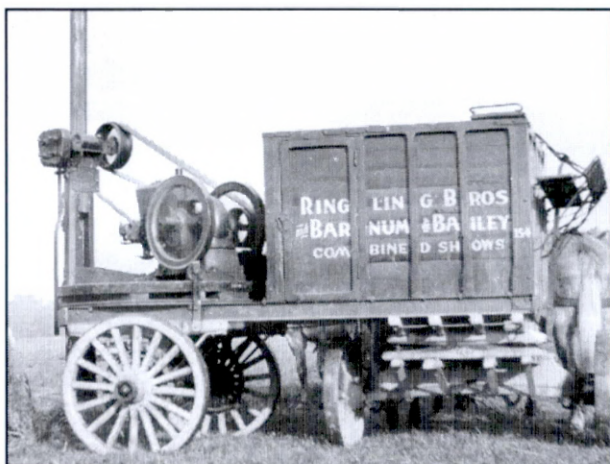
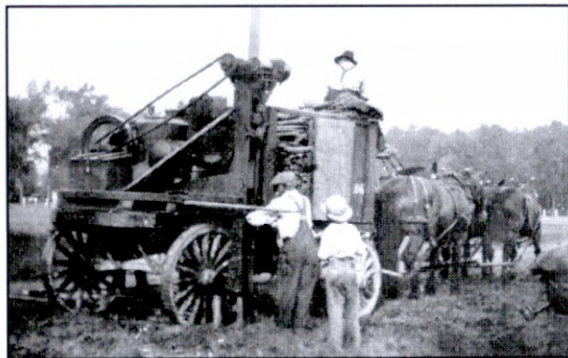


Fig. 50 The bands encircling spokes on the rear wheels of RBBBB 154 are a distinctive feature of this driver. Howard Tibbals collection.

than once if a hammer struck a glancing blow to a stake and then continued to descend to the ground. It must have been a significant refinement, as one sees it in nearly all subsequent stake drivers. The first installation of a stop plate can be dated about 1927. This was all a prelude to the triple, which existed as early as 1928.

The origin of the triple stake driver was possibly brought about by the means in which the tent is secured. As early as the Ringling tent described in the legal brief of 1905, two stakes were used in tandem to secure the pair of guy ropes at each side pole. Between adjacent pairs a single or pair of stakes was driven to provide an anchor for the extra guy. By adding a third hammer to the side

Fig. 51 The long lever attached to the platform of RBBBB #106 made it easier to turn into the desired position. Charles Kitto photograph, courtesy of Robert Kitto.



of the driver wagon, a set of three stakes, two for main guys and one for the extra, could be driven at once, avoiding the need to reposition the wagon. The nearly 50% time saving of the arrangement is obvious. In the view of Bert J. Chipman, author of the 1930 book *Hey Rube*, and possibly other of his contemporaries, Bill Curtis first made the machine which could simultaneously drive three stakes. He repeated a claim that it was capable of driving all of the stakes for the big top while the men were eating breakfast (page 117).

Curtis' triple was a mammoth machine, one in which the wagon shape became a box, significantly increasing both the weight and the strength of the vehicle. Overhead framing not only braced the top of the rear hammers, it also provided support for the third hammer and a means to secure the intermediate shaft necessary to power all three hammers. A boxed compartment below the driver's seat, fitted with removable panels, housed the gas engine that drove the chain drives powering the rollers. Stakes were placed lengthwise in a bin in the rear half of the wagon, in an area between the rear hammers and the engine. The mere appearance of the triple conveys power and endurance, adjectives which are well-suited to most of Curtis' achievements. The 1931 *Popular Mechanics* piece cited above suggests that Curtis received a patent for his stake driver arrangement; however, a recent patent search under his name in the appropriate time period failed to yield any entries.

Massive triple stake drivers, either built by Curtis or inspired by his concept, were eventually utilized with eight circuses and one wild west show. The Corporation's John Robinson Circus may have had Curtis' first, as early as 1928. It was numbered 93 in 1929 and was powered by a two cylinder, seven horsepower gas engine. We suspect that it was also rebuilt from its 1928 configuration, a somewhat imperfect arrangement, at a later date. A single hammer machine was on Robinson in 1930, suggesting that the JR triple was transferred to Hagenbeck-Wallace (HW), which had a triple by 1931 and one numbered 93 in 1932. Number 93 was on HW in 1934-1935 and likely 1930 and 1933. There was no driver on HW in 1929. Hagenbeck-Wallace added a second triple by 1934, number 99, which was



Fig. 52 Perhaps the best composed stake driver photograph ever taken is Harry Atwell's circa-1929 shot of RBBBB 107. It has a new Fairbanks, Morse & Co. engine driving it. Circus World Museum.

also there in 1935 with 93. Two triples, 98 and 99, were there in 1937 and a single one, 99, in 1938. The 1938 driver may have been a renumbered 93, as a November 20, 1939 Peru, Indiana wagon inventory lists HW numbers 98 and 99, which were eventually burned for scrap metal salvage in late 1941. The 1938 HW triple ended its days in California, never again serving on a circus. HW was the only circus to ever have two triples in the same season. When the loading lengths of the drivers

were given, the triples required thirteen feet on the train.

Sells-Floto carried a Curtis triple sometime after 1927. This driver carried number 3 in 1929 and 117 in 1930-1931. There was also a single hammer driver, likely the rebuilt 1927 driver and numbered 120, on the great 1931 Sells-Floto outfit, the only time a single and a triple ever served simultaneously on the same circus. The identity of Sells-Floto 119 of 1932 has not been ascertained, but a photo dated 1932 reveals a Curtis triple on the show. At one time, probably as early as 1927, the Sells-Floto triple was driven by a Witte engine. One suspects that engine companies may have tried to curry favor with Curtis for their engines, since the difficult circus applications would have been worthy advertising examples.

Since no other stake drivers appear on the 1939 Peru, Indiana, wagon inventory, it is possible that the Sells-Floto triple was transferred to another Ringling-owned property, specifically Al G. Barnes, which had a triple by 1935. If it was Barnes number 17 from 1935 through 1938, it was retired to and presumably dismantled at RBBB's Sarasota winter quarters. Others have claimed that the Sells-Floto triple was sold to the Tom Mix Circus, a motorized show. Mix was the featured attraction of Sells-Floto just a few years before and perhaps he knew Curtis and the capability of his triple. In 1936 Mix's

show carried #84, a 1936 Ford straight bed truck on which was mounted a triple hammer stake driver. It was the only triple ever to travel with a motorized show. The Mix triple differs from others on the Corporation shows by having inner and outer gear sets on the rollers. Only one of the 1937 Hagenbeck-Wallace drivers had a similar arrangement. The Mix driver was later acquired by Luke Anderson for his father's Seal Bros. Circus for the astonishingly low sum of \$250. The seller was a vehicle dealer who thought that the driver apparatus decreased the value of the truck! Anderson, one of the smartest men in the business, never revealed to the salesman that he was the son of a circus owner.

The circa 1923 Moeller-built driver of the Walter L. Main Circus was on the Miller Bros. 101 Ranch in 1925. It was replaced with a triple, number 108, as early as 1928 and through the final 1931 tour. The origin of the driver is unknown. At least, it cannot be aligned directly with Curtis. It was unusual, with sunburst wheels and unique driver head mechanics. The Miller triple may have been sold in 1935 to Jess Adkins and Zack Terrell for their new Cole Bros. operation. If it was, it was extensively rebuilt before the initial 1935 Cole tour. For 1935 and probably 1936 Cole used number 92, a machine where the rollers were mounted below the roof line. It was retired in favor of a new machine, number 110, for 1937. For 1938 the new driver went on Adkins and Terrell's second show, Robbins Bros. Circus, as number 89 and the older #92 was with Cole Bros. as number 17. The original Cole Bros. 1935-1936/1938 driver was renumbered 90 for the 1939 Cole tour and



Fig. 53 Possibly the first rotating double driver was RBBB's 108. It is shown here in 1935 with its distinctive rear sunburst wheels. Circus World Museum.

was lost in the Cole winter quarters fire on February 20, 1940. The 1937 driver became Cole number 89 for 1940 and was assigned number 99 in 1944. Though altered extensively during thirteen years of hard service, it survived the closing of the Cole show in 1950 and languished on the Paul Kelly farm in Peru, Indiana until acquired for preservation by the International Circus Hall of Fame in 1997. This wagon is the only remaining example of Curtis' labor-saving inventions. The last engine in the driver was a 9/10 horsepower Fairbanks, Morse and Company "Z" engine, with the style C self-oiling feature. The make was initially manufactured about 1915.

RBBB Stake Drivers

As common sense would suggest, RBBB owned more stake driver wagons than any other circus, having three on the show from 1925 to as late as 1939. All three singles were eventually converted to doubles. When the 1939 season commenced only two doubles were on the show, such was their increased productivity. RBBB never went for a triple, but soon began to experiment with a number of different driver platforms. They may have looked upon the triple as a "foreign" device of the Corporation's invention, or possibly considered it too heavy an apparatus. Besides, it drove three stakes and it had been Ringling practice to use paired stakes at guy loca-

Fig. 54 The last wagon mounted driver of RBBB was 108, shown here in 1949. By that time it was more trailer-like than wagon, lacking the usual wagon amenities. Circus World Museum.



tions. RBBB wagons were built on the principle of carrying a relatively large number of light vehicles, just the opposite of the Corporation's philosophy of fewer but heavier wagons. The former increased train length; the latter jammed everything on a much shorter train.

Previously conveyed information strongly suggests three driver machines on RBBB in 1925. Positive proof of that number is not available until 1927, when a train loading order from RBBB manager George Smith's files confirms both the number of drivers and their assigned numbers, 106, 107 and 108. The numbering would seem to be something of a throwback to the 1910s, when the Ringling outfit had a stake driver numbered 106. Actually, shortly after the 1919 combine an "interim" numbering system was employed on RBBB. Sometime between 1919 and 1924 the two 1917-built Ringling stake drivers that were numbered 101 and 104 became 154 and 155. The alignment of numbers is a challenging matter because of the great similarity of the devices. We think that 101 became 154, and later 106. Thereby 104 became 155 and ultimately 107. This further means that the 1925-built driver was number 108.

The first wagon with a twin hammer setup to be mounted on a rotating deck was apparently a Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey machine, despite Cap Curtis' claim to the contrary. Why the concept had not been tried earlier is unknown. It had the ability to halve the time expended in driving stakes. Perhaps the available time and manpower limited the need to invest in an ever more complicated machine upon which the circus would have to depend upon more heavily. Two single driver wagons were likely viewed as a lower risk that a single double hammer machine, in the event of a wagon loss. RBBB driver number 108 was expanded into a double configuration as early as 1935. Numbers 106 and 107 were doubles by 1937 and 1938, respectively. 106 served its last season in 1938, with 107 retired sometime after 1942 and before 1946.

The design advances implemented

on RBBB's dual rotating drivers included entirely steel bodies (1940), modern inline gasoline engines (1941) and dual pneumatic tires (1943). In addition to holding stakes, the stake box of RBBB drivers served a second purpose. An ex-RBBB workingman by the nickname of "Benny the Bum" stated that he and other roustabouts, up to four at one time, would use the stake compartment as a private shower room. Though the bottom was only open beams, the sides afforded some privacy since they measured about five feet high. It was one of the few luxuries enjoyed by workingmen who desired to keep themselves clean.³²

We believe that the roots of RBBB number 106 date to the 1910 Forepaugh-Sells machine. It went over to Ringling for 1915, possibly 1916, and was then scavenged for the making of 101 in 1917. 101 became 154 in the early 1920s and then 106 by 1927. This path of succession is traced by the presence of rear wheels that had unique bands or clips around them a few inches from the hubs. They were present on the machines noted, and on no other Ringling or RBBB drivers. When it bore the 154 identification it was powered by a Fairbanks, Morse and Company Type Z engine. By 1932 the distinctive Gollmar driver head was replaced by one with two extended shafts. It also had a Stover engine by this time. Photographs confirm that it was altered into a double by 1937. The oldest of the RBBB stake drivers, it was the first retired, in 1939, when its number was reassigned to an ex-Barnes cage wagon that joined the show.

The 1917-built 104 became 155. The wagon must have been rebuilt in the 1920s as the stake box changed from a two to a three vertical stiffener design by 1927. The Banner engine on it was superseded by a Fairbanks, Morse & Co. unit sometime in or after 1929, when the firm



Fig. 55 Air compressor technology had advanced in the three decades since Charlie Andress made the first compressed air driver. This is the next one, on the 1938 Col. Tim McCoy Wild West. Circus World Museum.

introduced their Type Z, Style B engine. Since the other machine became 106, this one must have been assigned 107. Photography documents that it was made a double by 1938. Number 107 was rebuilt for 1940 with an all-steel body. It was recorded in RBBB inventories as worth \$936.73 on December 10, 1940.

A distinctive feature of 108 for a number of years were the rear wheels, which were of the sunburst, or sunset, style. They were in place as early as 1935 to as late as 1941. Number 108 was rebuilt about the same time as 107, likely for 1940 but definitely by 1941, with an all-metal body. After both 107 and 108 were rebuilt they became nearly identical. So long as they had wood wheels, the easiest way to differentiate 107 and 108 was by the front undergear. The cross pieces above the fifth wheel on 107 were crosswise, parallel to the bolsters. Those on 108 were longitudinal, perpendicular to the bolsters. The old horizontal Stover Style K engine of 108 was replaced in mid-season 1941 by a modern four-cylinder, inline engine made by the Hercules Machine Company. Retired from circus use in mid-season 1956, RBBB 108 entered preservation in 1959 at Circus World Museum. A recent inspection of it revealed that the contact rollers were covered with a rubber surfacing, to increase the friction roller grip on the hammer lift bar. The turntable revolves on a set of crude cylindrical bearings set in a circle of the same

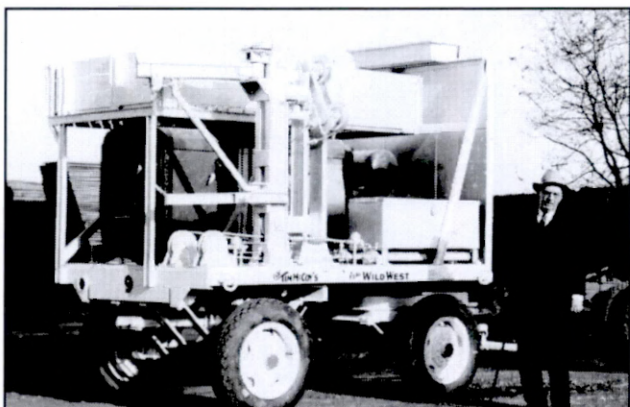


Fig. 56 The hammers and the apparatus which lifted and maneuvered them were on the right hand side of the 1938 McCoy drivers. Builder Frank Fellows is at right. Pfening Archives.

circumference as the platform.

H. Frank Fellows and the Pneumatic Stake Driver

Homer Franklin "Uncle Billy" Fellows (1873-1955) is best remembered today for his ownership of the Springfield Wagon & Trailer Company of Springfield, Missouri and its construction of fabricated steel wagons with pneumatic wheels for various railroad shows of the 1930s. Among his clients were Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey and Hagenbeck-Wallace. For the entirely new Col. Tim McCoy's Real Wild West of 1938, Fellows' firm designed and fabricated a fleet of 38 sleek new wagons, one of the greatest wagon building efforts of all time.³³ Included in the manufacture were two stake drivers, numbers 8 and 9, each measuring a compact 10 feet long.

Unlike the other mechanical stake drivers of the time that evolved from the Heiser, Gollmar and Curtis designs, Fellows and his engineers developed a new apparatus that utilized compressed air. The principal hammer element of the machines appears to have been a conventional construction pneumatic hammer. The idea was suggested to Fellows by an old showman named "Ring Stock Johnny" who may have been at either the Rochester or Peru, Indiana circus quarters. Fellows had gone there to pick the brains of show people to learn the best way to build show wagons and equipment. One wonders

if old Johnny had knowledge of the Andress driver of three decades before. The new machine seems like an update of the 1905 concept utilizing contemporary compressed air technology.

Each driver wagon housed a large Gardner-Denver air compressor. Stakes were carried in an open bin above, and shielding, the compressor. On each driver there were two hammers, one of which was fixed in the middle of the right side. The other was mounted on a pivoting gantry frame which could be swung about vertical oriented hinge points on the right side of the wagon. The hammer column could also be positioned close to, or far away from, the wagon frame, as desired. Fred D. Pfening, Jr.'s monograph on the McCoy show says that the pivot framing was so designed that it would locate stakes at the 60 inch centers of the canopy attachment points. Pfening states there were three heads on each driver, but we find only the two described. The hammer head, probably an adapted construction jack hammer type device, was elevated to its start position by means of an air cylinder, working through a wire rope and pulleys. It was the most advanced design yet offered for the task of driving stakes. Charlie Andress would certainly have loved to see it.

To prove the new design, the drivers were taken to the fairgrounds in Springfield, Missouri where they were put to the test of driving stakes through asphalt pavement. Earlier tests with a conventional construction jack hammer had shown the great effectiveness of the technology for the application. Whether the new concept worked successfully on the road is unknown, but nothing to the contrary was recorded. One wonders if the harsh impact of the pneumatic hammer quickly mushroomed even the most durable of hardwood stakes with reinforcing bands. The McCoy show failed on May 4, preventing the

Springfield design from getting a full season's test. Save for a few wagons sold to traveling shows, the Springfield wagons were reclaimed by Fellows and modified for government and construction use. The eventual disposition of these drivers remains unknown. As was the case with the earlier Andress pneumatic stake driver, the Fellows machine became nothing more than a memory.

Notes

23. Copy in Moeller Papers, CWM. Unless otherwise cited, all Moeller information came from the Moeller Papers.

24. The clipped note in CWM files is a "Thirty Years Ago Today" flashback from the March 12, 1937 *Baraboo News-Republic*.

25. Ringling Bros. Papers, Fred D. Pfening III collection.

26. *Ibid.*

27. Moeller ledger, 1913-1917, page 85; *Billboard*, March 28, 1913, p. 23; letter from George Arlington to Henry Moeller dated April 29, 1913.

28. *Billboard*, January 18, 1919, p. 26; February 1, 1919, p. 28; November 24, 1951, p. 74.

29. Curtis' career is chronicled in *Billboard*, October 8, 1949, pp. 56, 65; November 24, 1951, p. 74; and April 16, 1955, pp. 51 and 54. The data there is augmented, and corrected in some cases, by show data in CWM files.

30. "Circus Tents and Pecans," unpublished manuscript, Earl Chapin May Papers, Box 3, Folder 3, CWM.

31. George L. Chindahl Papers, Box 4, Folder 22, CWM.

32. The anecdote was recorded by C. P. Fox and is found in the Thomas P. Parkinson papers, CWM.

33. For information on Fellows see "Wagons Roll Frank Fellows Into Circus, Carnival Field," *The Billboard*, June 30, 1951, page 90; Fred D. Pfening, Jr., "H. Frank Fellows-Circus Wagon Builder, The *White Tops*, November-December 1955, page 13; and *Billboard*, June 4, 1955, page 43. For the McCoy show story, see Fred D. Pfening, Jr., *Col. Tim McCoy's Real Wild West and Rough Riders of the World*, (Columbus, Ohio: Pfening & Snyder, 1955).

M. L. CLARK & SONS COMBINED SHOWS

SEASON OF 1930

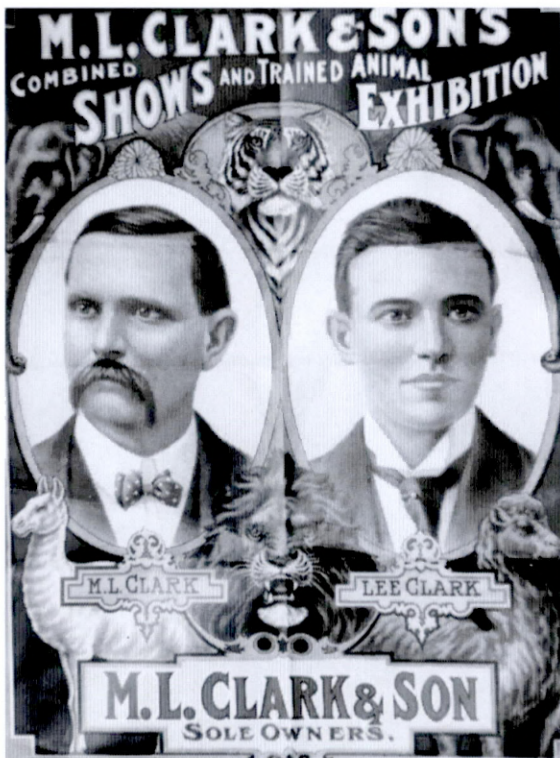
By Joseph T. Bradbury

The M. L. Clark show toured from 1883 to 1930 under three generations of the Clark family. This is the story of the the final season of the circus while the Clarks owned it. Forty-seven years of traversing the sawdust trail places the circus near the head of the list for longevity.

The history of the Clark circus appeared in an article in the March-April 1965 *Bandwagon*. It covered the show from its beginning to the sale to E. E. Coleman in 1930.

During its lifetime the circus moved by all means of surface transportation. It started as a horse drawn overland mud show. In 1909 it traveled on rail using three flats, two stocks and two coaches. By mid-season it reverted back overland travel. That was M. L. Clark's only venture as a flat car railroad operation. In 1922 he joined Floyd and Howard King to operate a three car tunnel car railroad operation. By the mid-1920s he began adding trucks and during the final season had a combination of wagons and trucks.

In 1993 Henry Fraser interviewed on tape Mack and Neil Clark, sons of Lee Clark, who still lived in Alexandria, Louisiana, the former winter home of the Clark circus. The Clark grandsons, as they will be referred to in this article, traveled with the show during their school vacations in the 1920s and were there when it was sold in 1930. In the final year Mack was almost 14 and Neil eighteen months younger. Both provided interesting information on the show, especially about the period when trucks were being added during the final seasons.



Donaldson lithograph featuring M. L. and Lee Clark. Pfening Archives.

In earlier years the show traveled the Western territory, sometimes wintering in El Paso, Texas, but dur-

ing the lifetime of the grandsons it was quartered in Alexandria in show-owned buildings. The show later extended its travel area to Eastern regions, but was routed mainly in the deep south from Louisiana to Florida and up in the Appalachian regions of Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginias. It sometimes went into Ohio and Pennsylvania.

M. L. Clark died in 1926 and his son Lee became sole owner. Several other members of the Clark family, mainly cousins, were with the show during the final years, but had no ownership. Lee Clark bought a Chevrolet truck in 1925 for the cookhouse, the first motorized vehicle on the show. He later bought a Ford Model T and drove it from town to town. He added a house car for his family around 1926. It was

described as an early version of a camper truck. A family-owned photograph shows it was a box-like body

Letterhead used by Coleman in 1930. Pfening Archives.



built on a truck chassis with a home-made cab with side windows and a door on the main body.

THE 1930 SEASON

Following the 1929 season, which had been a fairly good one for most shows, the Clark outfit went into winter quarters as usual in Alexandria, Louisiana. However, the Buck Jones Wild West and the King brothers' Gentry Bros. folded that year. Show owners did not realize at the time the effect of the October stock market crash. It was clear during the first weeks of the 1930 season that the depression was seriously effecting ticket sales.

During its final season the circus moved overland using seven trucks and a number of wagons pulled by horses and ponies.

The Isaac Marcks notes list 25 horses and ponies, and five cages of animals. It featured circus acts and a wild west after show. There was one elephant, Mena, and a large one hump camel, Mose. Both had been imported from the Hagenbeck Zoo in Germany.

Mena, an Asian female received her name from Mena, Arkansas, the town in which she arrived on the show by rail car.

The Woodcock files state that Mena arrived in 1891 and a second elephant, Ned, arrived in 1903. From 1908 to 1912 there were a total of four elephants, Mena, Ned, Babe and Tony, on the Clark circus. From 1913 to 1920 there were only Mena and Ned. Ned was an Asian male who had grown so huge with large tusks that Clark sold him in 1921 to Al G. Barnes. Barnes named him Tusko and he became one of the best known elephants in American circus history. From that time on Mena was the entire M. L. Clark herd. By 1930 she was a very large animal and walked overland between stands along with Mose the camel, the horses and ponies.



Caged animals mentioned at the time of sale included a kangaroo, a hyena, four monkeys, two burros and a zebra.

The Clark show was a one of the last circuses still walking its stock overland as late as 1930. The late Joe

The 1930 midway with concession tents, marquee and big top. Albert Conover collection.

foot in the late 1920s. As heavier trucks became available all shows began hauling all of their stock.

No written information is available about the size of the Clark canvas. Photos indicate the 1930 big top as about a 70 foot round top with one 40 foot middle piece, seating several hundred people. A small marquee was lettered "Main Entrance." The side show-menagerie was probably a 50 with two 20 foot middles. It was fronted by a large entrance banner and two smaller ones on each side. The pad room was a small push pole tent with a section blocked off for horses and ponies. Also on the lot were a dining tent and several small concession tents.

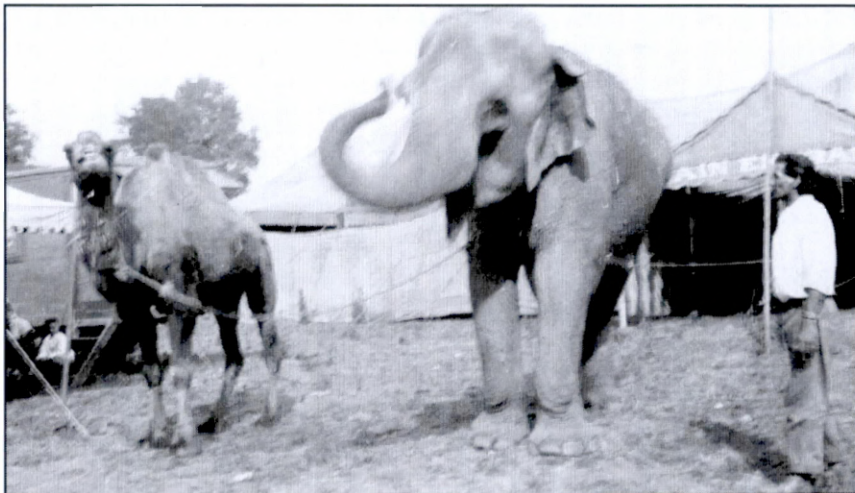
The big top and side show tent in 1930. Albert Conover collection.



Ned, on left, and Mena shortly before Ned was sold to the Al G. Barnes show. Pfening Archives.

Fleming saw Orton Bros. in 1929 and that show still walked its stock. Two Mighty Haag elephants moved on





Chief Deerfoot with Mose and Mena in 1930. Albert Conover collection.

The *Billboard* did not publish any information about the Clark performance prior to the sale in August. Chief Deerfoot worked the elephant and Mack Clark worked a horse in the main show.

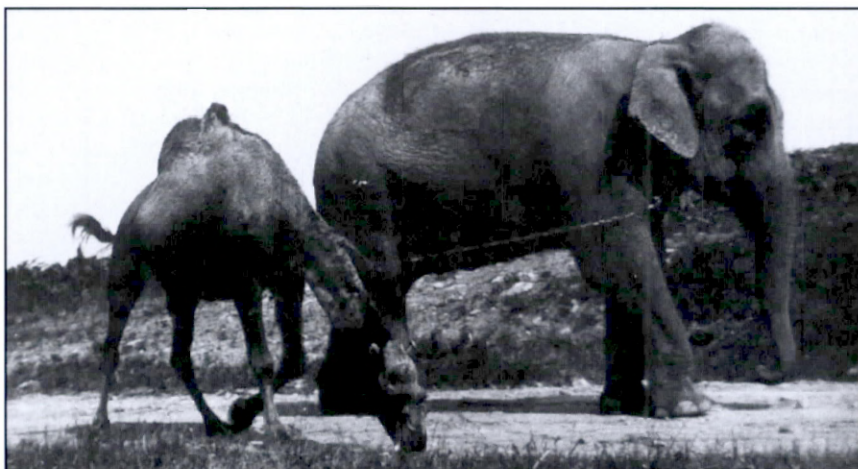
The date and location of the opening in the spring of 1930 is unknown. The July 12 *Billboard* reported the following stands in West Virginia: Glenville, July 10; Troy, July 11; Smithville, July 12; and Harrisville, July 14. These towns are in the very rural areas with sub-standard roads.

Mack Clark recalled the show's trucks had a tough time on the mountain roads. One time a stalled truck suddenly started rolling slowly backwards into Mena, who tried to fight off the moving monster with her

A group of cowboys in the Clark back yard. A titled truck is at right. Albert Conover collection.



tusk. Neither animal or vehicle were hurt. Another time he and Neil were riding in the back seat of their father's Model T Ford when a truck started rolling backwards toward



them. The boys got scared and jumped out, but once again there was no damage.

In 1930 the Clark circus operated with a one ring format. The Clark

grandsons recalled other seasons when it used two rings, sometimes three. Extra middles were carried for big days. If the crowd in a town appeared light only one middle piece would be erected.

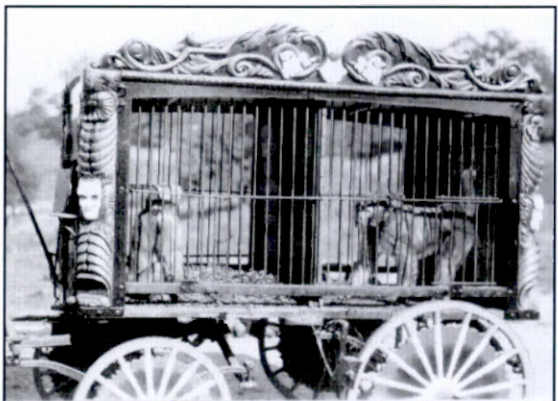
Although by mid-summer the *Billboard* published nothing about the Clark outfit, there was plenty of circus news, most of it bad. All circuses, large and small, were suffering from lack of business caused by the depression. The 20 car Christy Bros. folded in July and the King brothers 10 car Cole Bros. in August. In early September John Ringling's John Robinson Circus closed due to bad business.

The September 13 *Billboard* told of the sale of the M. L. Clark & Son's Shows: "A report reaching the *Billboard* recently that the M. L.

Mose and Mena walking overland in 1930. Albert Conover collection.

Clark Circus, one of the oldest and best known overland shows, a portion of its career on rails and formerly known as the M. L. Clark Shows, had passed into the hands of E. E. Coleman. Confirmation of this transfer was contained in a letter from Coleman last week and regarding plans for the show's operation."

Coleman stated in his letter that he had taken over the show at Brunswick, Maryland on August 14. Two railroad cars were used to transport the stock, animals and the elephant Mena to his winter quarters.



Cross cage used by Coleman in 1930. It probably came from the American Circus Corporation. Albert Conover collection.

The trucks carrying show equipment were driven overland to Xenia, Ohio. Three animal cages and other items were also added. Nearly all the performers and working men were retained. No performances were scheduled for Xenia. The show at the time was playing a few stands in Ohio and then played some already contracted indoor dates. Coleman noted that the outfit included 25 horses and ponies, five cages of animals. The performance consisted of circus acts and a wild west concert. He intended to add cages and horses and put the show out in 1931 as a two ring circus.

In an October 1998 telephone interview with Mack Clark by Henry Fraser, Clark said the show was sold for \$4,500, around \$50,000 in today's dollars.

Clark said the reason for the sale was the deepening depression and the advent of small moving picture

The back yard of the Coleman circus in 1930. Albert Conover collection.



traveling units in tents. One of the Clark relatives left the show to operate a tented picture show. Clark said his father, Lee, thought he could see what the future held.

Lee Clark, his wife and two sons left the circus in Brunswick, Maryland. With \$4,500 in his pocket he headed home in a Super 8 Hudson pulling a horse trailer loaded with the horse Mack rode and roped in the performance. He had a blacksmith build the trailer before they left. The trip to Alexandria took about ten days.

The Coleman side of the transaction was told by Coonie Maloon in the March 17, 1955 *Bandwagon*: "At the time of the purchase of the Clark show I was managing a tabloid show in the Rialto Theater at Dayton, Ohio. The theater being operated at that time by E. E. Coleman. He had a year or so before sold his circus to John Pluto of Baltimore, Maryland, and was anxious to get back in the circus business. Learning that the Clark show was for sale, Coleman and myself drove to a small town in West Virginia where the show was then playing. When we arrived we found a couple of other showmen also interested in the purchase of a circus. They had been on the show for several days. One of these men was Paul Liniger, who several years before had operated a small circus called Liniger Bros. We stayed on a couple of days. Finally drove back to Dayton.

"Coleman and I talked the deal over and he decided to buy the show. I drove back to Terre Alta a small

town on the Virginia and Maryland state line where I again caught up with the show and on August 7th the show was in Marginsville, Virginia. The show encountered some trouble there and the outfit wild catted over the state line into Maryland. A couple of the Lucky Boys had been jailed in Martinsville and Bill Chiclistler, out of Chester, West Virginia was the fixer, went bail and got the fellows released. In the meantime I had negotiated the sale for Coleman and the show was brought to Brunswick, Maryland. At this time there were 52 people with the show and amongst them were the aerial Delmars, the Grant Family and Tex Cheanault who had the concert. There were some 25 head of horses, 6 ponies, 1 elephant, Mena, 2 burros, 1 very large camel, 1 zebra, 1 kangaroo, 4 monkeys, and 1 hyena.

"The show was then being moved by some horse drawn wagons and seven 1928 Chevrolet trucks. The elephant and camel were walked from town to town. So when the show arrived in Brunswick, I ordered a large furniture car. All the animals, the elephant and 13 head of horses along with the ponies and burros were loaded in the car, as was the big top canvas.

"A showman by the name of Bob Davis had been sent on from Dayton with six men to drive the trucks through. So the trucks left Brunswick, Morland, on August 14th, early in the morning and the loaded railroad car left on a fast freight at noon that same day. I went with the car to take care of the animals. All of the show, both by railroad and highway, headed for Xenia, Ohio, where I had arranged to make a fast paint and overhaul job and return it to the road for the balance of that season. Benny Wells had been engaged to paint the show and Ross Engle to go as agent. The Stoltz family were engaged to play in the band. The show would stay out until as late in the fall as possible.

"In due time I arrived in Xenia with the car and animals. Two days later Bob Davis and a couple of his boys arrived with three of the trucks. I was informed that one had gone over the mountain and was a total wreck. The other one was back at

Cumberland, Maryland, broken down. This accounted for 5 of the trucks, but there were still 2 missing. I immediately drove back over the highway and at Cumberland I found the prop truck by the side of the road, the motor being completely shot. I went to the freight agent's office where I ordered a Gondola R. R. Car with end doors and with the help of several towners I employed and the Chevrolet agency there, the truck was dragged in, loaded on the car, chalked down and covered with canvas. The car was billed out, and sent on to Xenia.

"Now to find the other two missing trucks. I was able to do this while driving back towards Xenia, Ohio, making inquiries along the way and going over a different route than the one I drove up on, they were come across during the night at a school-house where I happened to see a campfire burning. On stopping, I found the two lost trucks, these two drivers had run' out money and gas and were waiting for someone to come back. In an hour or so I had them rolling towards Xenia. To replace the truck that had been wrecked I bought one from Jimmy Woods. He also came on and took the side show for the balance of that season. The aforementioned Bob Davis was sent out as bill poster. The show opened at Vandalia, Ohio, stayed out four weeks and closed at Lebanon, Ohio.

"The Clark show at the time this deal was made was then owned by Lee Clark. But there were two other Clarks on the show. Bill 'Gold Tooth' Clark was agent and Lum Clark who had the pit show featuring a very nice Silver Cape Baboon. These Clarks were all related, but Lee Clark was sole owner.

"Lum Clark came on to Xenia after the show was sold and stayed until the show closed for the season.

"As Mena, the elephant, had never been around a railroad show I experienced a very difficult time with her when I attempted to load her in the railroad car at Brunswick, Maryland. It required 5 1/2 hours to get her in the car and by that time half of the population of the town were in the railroad yards to see the loading of Mena.

"After that season of 1930 Coleman bought a truck and she was hauled in place of walking from town to town as she had all previous seasons.

"Mena was sold in 1940 to Al G. Kelly & Miller Bros. Circus together with the Fink dogs and ponies, and I delivered them to the show for Coleman at Dodge City, Iowa."

Apparently Maloon did not know that Mena had been with the Clark railroad circus in 1909 and the three car show in 1922.

Little is known about the route or the performance of the reopened Clark show, The Clarks had traditionally presented a strong wild west contingent. Photos of the Coleman version show four cowboys. Chief Deerfoot continued to work Mena. Lum Clark continued with his baboon pit show on the midway. All of the 1930 photos were taken after Coleman bought the show.

Coleman ran this ad in the September 27 *Billboard*: "At liberty for fall and winter dates. Entire circus, including ground and aerial performers. Rodeo and wild west people with stock. Dogs and ponies. Very large elephant and camel. Special advertising matter. Will book all or any part of above. M. L. Clark & Son's Shows, 212 S. Jefferson Street, Dayton, Ohio."

Further reference to the Clark show appeared in the November 15 *Billboard*: "Clark in quarters in Dayton, Ohio."

"The M. L. Clark & Son's show has winter quarters on a 120 acre farm. In the well heated buildings are running water and electric lights.

"A few dates were played following

the regular closing of the show. Quite a lot of stock was used at the Richmond, Ohio fair. Some of the performers, the elephant, camel, ponies, dogs and wild west horses were at the Hamilton, Ohio fair. The pumpkin show at Circleville, Ohio was worked by Mena and was a big hit. The elephant walked from Circleville to Dayton, a distance of seventy-five miles. Several other winter dates have been arranged. Coonie Maloon has been managing the show for E. E. Coleman, as the theater business takes up most of his time.

"The show will be enlarged for next season and new equipment will be used."

The 1930 season came to an end and the results of the first full year of the great depression had been devastating for many circuses. Evidently there had been reports that the Clark show would not tour in 1931.

The February 14, 1931 *Billboard* reported otherwise: "Clark show going out.

"E. E. Coleman, owner of the M. L. Clark & Son's Show, advises that the show will go out this season, reports to the contrary notwithstanding. But no definite plans as yet have been made. Chief Deerfoot and Shorty have been in quarters in Dayton, Ohio this winter. Coonie Maloon has made several trips in the interest of the outfit."

The February 21 *Billboard* reported: "Clark animal acts sent to Chicago.

Side show opening of the Clark show in 1930. Albert Conover collection.





This Donaldson Clark lithograph is the only poster still owned by the Neil Clark family. Henry Fraser photo.

"Dayton, Ohio, February 14. E. E. Coleman, owner of the M. L. Clark show in quarters here, sent Mena, a large female elephant, a camel and some western horses to Chicago last Saturday. Coonie Maloon was in charge and Chief Deerfoot, Jess Carpenter and two others went along. The elephant was picked by Mayor William Hale Thompson to assist him in the campaign for reelection as mayor of Chicago. It was used to parade in the Loop District. Mena is also working theaters.

"Arrangements have been made to establish an office for the Clark show in Chicago with D. W. Fisher in charge. Winter quarters and general offices will remain in Dayton.

"The outfit this season will have two dog acts. A small elephant will be worked with Mena, this number will be a feature. More animal acts will be added."

Mayor "Big Bill" Thompson mentioned in the article was a colorful character. A few years earlier when the Prince of Wales, later King Edward VIII of England, who had a reputation as being a ladies man, planned to visit Chicago, Big Bill had this to say: "If that Prince comes here and starts messing with our women I'll punch him in the nose."

As for the acquisition of another

elephant by Coleman, nothing further came of it.

Although Coleman planned to make a tour in 1931 that idea was canceled. A blank employment contract for M. L. Clark & Lee Bros. Circus Combined, dated in the 1930s, is in the Circus World Museum files. Possibly this was to have been Coleman's title in 1931 or later in the decade. He didn't return to full circus operation until 1943.

Coleman built a large semi trailer to transport Mena. The side was painted in huge letters, "Mena, largest female elephant in America."

An interesting short piece appeared in a Dayton, Ohio, newspaper on December 13, 1931 about Coleman's quarters and some of his animals. It was illustrated with a photo showing Mena and Mose the camel together. Mena's name appeared as Minnie and Mose as Marion. A mention in the article that Coleman took the animals in as payment on a debt by a circus was not correct, but that winter it made a good story. Reference of plans to use a heavy platform as a motorized stall was probably correct.

Old Mose, the camel, died in Dayton sometime in the 1930s. But Mena had an active life, being rented out to a number of circuses. She was on William Ketrow's Kay Bros. Circus in 1932 and possibly the following season. In 1934 Mena and a steam calliope Coleman had acquired

were rented to Howard King's new motorized Rice Bros. Circus before being returned to him. A short time later Mena was leased to the new Duggan Bros. Circus for the rest of the 1934 season.

In 1935 Mena was leased to the Johnny J. Jones Shows, a large railroad carnival. In all probability she was transported in her regular semi rather than in one of the carnival's stock cars. After being sold to the Kelly-Miller circus Mena died on October 13, 1943 in Waurike, Oklahoma.

Coleman didn't return to active circus operation until the 1940s. In 1943 he put out a small motorized show using the M. L. Clark title. In 1944 the show was called Seils-Sterling. In 1945 it was again M. L. Clark & Sons Combined Circus. The story of Coleman's war time circuses was told by the author in the September-October 1990 *Bandwagon*.

EPILOG

Mack L. Clark, son of Lee Clark and grandson of M. L. Clark, in 1998 is the surviving family member, his brother Neil, having passed away. Mack noted that there is quite a bit of colorful Clark paper in existence, but he has only one lithograph, a colorful Donaldson one sheet picturing a "double somersault leaping tournament by champion long distance leapers of America." This design is new to virtually all collectors. He also remembered visiting a very old general store in Florida with a M. L. Clark poster in the window. The store owner said a Clark billposter had put it in the window many years earlier. Lee Clark once owned a show titled Circle C Ranch Wild West which toured around 1912 as a winter operation. The family has one of that show's rare letterheads. At times the family also operated a minstrel show.

The following helped in the preparation of this article: Henry Fraser, Mack and Neil Clark, Albert Conover who knew E. E. Coleman and is owner the Coleman circus negative collection, Fred Dahlinger, the Circus World Museum and Fred D. Pfening, Jr.

BEN DAVENPORT THE CONCERT

By Orin Copple King

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Orin Copple King

Early on a Sunday morning in October 1948, I took a wide awake three year old for a stroller ride so that her mother could get some rest. We wandered down to the Santa Fe station in Topeka and I was surprised by what I saw. Parked on the main line was a circus train, Dailey Bros. Circus, a show which was new to me. In 1948 I was the only circus fan in the world and I was afraid snoop people would discover my affliction.

I was relieved to learn that Topeka's circus date, posted for October 7, had not changed. Dailey Bros. was en route to three other Kansas dates before returning to Topeka. I attended the set up and the performance and I must say I was not impressed.

Dailey Bros. returned to Topeka for exhibitions on May 5, 1950. I spent the day at the runs and on the lot. The wind was blowing strongly and the canvas crew tried several times before they succeeded in raising the big top. The wind provided me one of my favorite circus memories. I was accompanied by a friend who was wearing a felt hat. The wind blew his hat away and it came to rest on the ground in front of a huge elephant. I urged my buddy to go get it, but he took only one step when the elephant picked it up, brushed it off and ate it. Later we saw the hat band hanging from the elephant's mouth, but my friend refused to reclaim it.

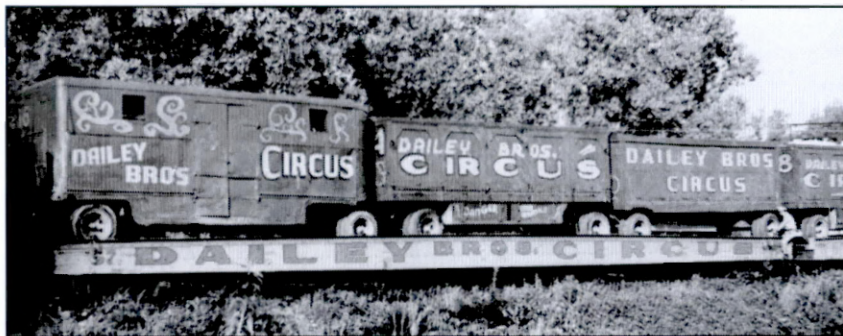
The performance was a disappointment and the tent



Benjamin C. Davenport on his private railroad car on Dailey Bros. Circus. All illustrations are from the Pfening Archives.

seemed awfully empty. The star performer was a pretty young girl, Norma, daughter of Ben Davenport. I was impressed by a cook who was

Dailey Bros. Circus in 1946.



frying eggs in the kitchen wagon. His hands were huge and he could break four eggs at a time, two with each hand. Someone pointed out Ben Davenport, but I did not meet him until 14 years later.

The *Topeka State Journal* on July 6, 1964, carried an ad for the Holliday Square Shopping Center announcing the coming of Jungle Wonder Circus for "7 Big Days," beginning July 6. Also advertised were lions, ferrets, and monkeys. "Plus a real steam calliope, one of six still in operation." And, "Seven other attractions & rides at small cost."

The first indication of trouble on the Jungle Wonder Circus appeared on the front page of the *Topeka Daily Capital* on July 8. "ELEPHANT WALKS OUT.

"Arokiaswami Arumai Singh, with help from a dozen policemen and sheriff's deputies, Tuesday freed Myrtle, a 3 ton elephant that Singh left behind when he walked away from his \$3 a day job with the B. C. Davenport Circus performing in Topeka.

"Once the elephant was freed from chains in the parking lot at a Topeka shopping center where the circus was performing, Singh led Myrtle across Topeka Avenue and more than four miles down 29th to Croco Road and another two miles to the Circle C Ranch. The animal was boarded at the ranch for the night.

"Without performing any of her circus tricks, Myrtle turned heads and stopped traffic, creating a

bottleneck along 29th Street with her slow, lumbering saunter.

"Singh (pronounced 'Sing' by his friends), a native of India and veteran animal trainer, kept Myrtle moving along while her then-walking police escort of five patrolmen and deputies followed.

"Shawnee County Undersheriff F. T. (Jim) Chaffee led deputies and policemen in removing the animal from the circus area on a writ of replevin.

"Chaffee said Singh has papers showing he received Myrtle from Davenport in 1956 as reimbursement for back pay.

"Chaffee said Davenport had indicated there would be real trouble if the elephant was removed.

"However, policemen with clubs, a police dog and armed deputies discouraged any intervention, although several of the circus workers appeared suddenly from the 'carny' wagons when Singh started to unchain Myrtle.

"Ed Collins, one of four plain-clothes sheriff's men planted around the circus area, said one of the workers made a move to start trouble, but did not.

"Singh, who 'just walked away' from the circus Monday night, said he quit because he is tired of working seven days a week and making only \$3, or even sometime \$1, a day.

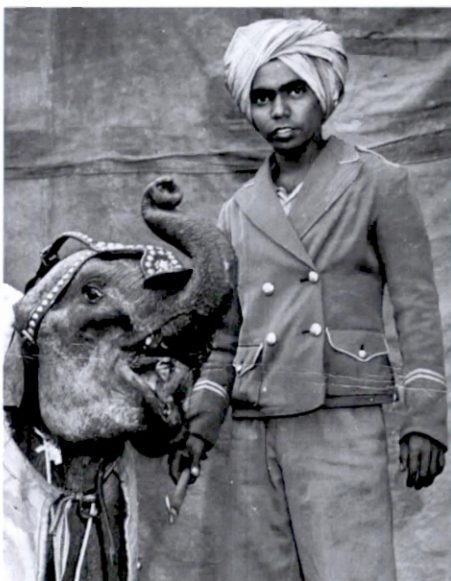
"His father and grandfather were animal trainers in India,' he said. Singh, 38, came from India in 1947 to work for Davenport.

"They (the circus management) told me I could be a movie star,' Singh said, 'like Sabu, the Indian elephant boy. I have never been in a movie yet. But I did not lose hope,' he smiled. 'Maybe someday, you never can tell.'

"When Singh was in South America touring with a circus troupe for eight years, he had to leave his wife and daughter in Venezuela. They have been there for 2 years he said.

"On \$3 a day I have not enough money to bring them to this country,' Singh said. 'I send them all I can so they can live there.'

"He said he has slept in a small compartment in one of the trucks.



Arokiaswami Arumai Singh, Ben Davenport's long time employee.

His \$3 a day or less was for 'meals and my washing.'

"Pat Wyatt, who used to perform as a trapeze artist for nearly two years with the Davenport troupe, quit the show with Singh.

"I got tired, too, of working for \$2 or \$3 a day,' Miss Wyatt said. 'And we (the management) just couldn't get along.'

"Miss Wyatt helped Singh guide Myrtle through traffic Tuesday, using a borrowed policeman's billy club. She quit her job to help Singh, 'because he's been like a brother to me, and I want to help him get his family together again.'

"Myrtle is a special elephant,' Singh said of his friendly, water-loving 3-ton Myrtle after reaching the ranch.

"She likes to eat women's purses, paper, anything she can get her trunk on.'

"Myrtle made herself at home at Circle C, which is operated by Jerry Chaffee, son of the under sheriff.

"Down, Myrtle, more down, more down,' yelled Singh as he punched Myrtle with a makeshift probe--a crowbar.

"After she was down, policemen took turns climbing atop.

"It's like riding on sandpaper,' policeman Darl Everett said.

"Would she drink 50 gallons of water a day?' policeman Fred Zirnstein asked Singh. 'Oh, yeah,' he answered.

"Singh talked of his future while the Chaffee youngsters hosed Myrtle the elephant with water.

"I want to stay in Topeka until I can earn enough money to buy a truck to transport Myrt and bring my family here,' Singh said.

"Singh said he wants to use Myrtle for promotional performances for shopping centers and stores.

"She's the only elephant who can do the Sally Rand Fan Dance,' he said. 'She holds a fan in her trunk and does the two-step.'

"For an encore Myrtle dances the Twist and plays ball,' Singh related.

"Myrtle, on her six-mile jaunt through traffic on city and highway thoroughfares, created a show.

"Stopping to swipe up scrapes of paper in the street, and bunches of grass, she stopped traffic and drew crowds of youngsters and barking dogs.

"But it was hot--more than 90 degrees--and Myrtle stopped at two service stations to get water, get watered down, and occasionally, with a shower from her trunk watered down the escort of five policemen and deputies who walked the nearly six miles to the Circle C.

"Then at the ranch and riding academy, she drank soda pop from a bottle."

The *Capital* used two photographs of Myrtle. On the front page was Myrtle leading the march away from the circus, and on another page Singh sitting on the ground under Myrtle's trunk.

Topeka's evening paper, the *State Journal* also featured Myrtle on the front page with a story much the same as that in the *Capital* with a few lines of additional reportage.

"Charles Rooney, Jr., attorney for the circus management, said Wednesday a \$6,000 'redelivery' bond would be posted in the afternoon and the elephant would be taken back to the shopping center from a ranch where the animal was taken Tuesday afternoon.

"The papers Singh had produced indicated B. C. Davenport of the B. C. Davenport Circus gave the elephant to Singh in 1956 as back pay.

"Singh's attorney, Leonard Pipkin, said Wednesday Singh contends he owns the animal, but Rooney said

Davenport bought the elephant in 1942 from a person who has sent a telegram to Topeka affirming Davenport's contention.

"There is no question in my mind that sole ownership rests with Davenport," Rooney said. "Final decision will be up to the court, which the dispute is bound to reach," Rooney said.

"Meanwhile, back at the ranch, Myrtle, the 3 ton elephant, spent the night tied to a tree. She weathered the storm which swept through Topeka early Wednesday [Rainfall .63], but the tree to which she was tied took a beating, Mrs. Chaffee said—not from the storm, but from Myrtle. The animal did not try to uproot the tree, Mrs. Chaffee said, but did damage to low-hanging branches.

"Myrtle does not appear excited," Mrs. Chaffee said, but the horses on the Circle C are 'scared to death.'

"Her children ages 3 and 5 have been feeding Myrtle so much Mrs. Chaffee said she has warned them there soon will be nothing for them to eat if they don't let up. One dish on Myrtle's menu, courtesy of the children, was a box of rasins. Myrtle ate the box and all.

"On the way to the ranch Tuesday, one deputy carried a shot gun which he said he would use to shoot himself if the elephant got loose."

On the front page of the *Journal* was a close-up photograph of Singh with Myrtle in the background. On an inside page was a shot of Myrtle's rear as she walked away from the show.

On July 8, Myrtle was back home on the circus thanks to the \$6,000 redelivery bond posted for Davenport by B. B. Curry. Myrtle was transported in a truck for the six mile journey. The *Capital* on July 9, ran a photo of Ben back on the lot walking side-by-side with Myrtle.

"Our Myrtle is back home with us," Davenport roared over the circus public address system," according to the *Capital*, on July 9.

"In a gravel-throated voice, he sang an improvised version of *My Indiana Home* with several references to the dancing Myrtle."

"We won't do anything about getting the elephant back now," Pipkin,

This ad appeared in the Topeka *State Journal* on July 6, 1964.

speaking for Singh Wednesday night, said.

"We'll sit tight until we hear from the court," he said. "The case could come up within 60 days."

"Meanwhile, everybody involved is busy checking on each other.

"Singh said immigration authorities from Kansas City talked to him Wednesday.

"Pipkin said the Highway Patrol is checking on Davenport on his entry clearance. Federal inspectors are expected to arrive today to check on possible violations of the federal hourly wage law, he said."

"Singh sued circus owner B. C. Davenport, Palma, Alabama," according to the July 11 *Capital*, "for \$37,920 plus 5 per cent, which is double the amount of back wages he alleges is due him since he was employed December 15, 1961 at a \$150 weekly salary.

"The trapeze artist sued for \$820, which is double the amount she alleges is due her for back wages since March 10, 1964.

"Both Singh and Patricia Wyatt ask an amount matching their alleged back pay as punitive payment under Kansas statutes. In addition they both ask an additional 5 per cent per month liquidated damages and costs of the court actions."

The *Journal* reported on July 13 that "Myrtle the dancing elephant was back in the spotlight early Monday, when the Shawnee County Humane Society filed charges in

Court of Topeka against B. C. Davenport.

"Davenport, operator of the Jungle Wonder Circus which has moved from one local shopping center on to another [Eastboro Center] for a week, was charged by the society with alleged failure to provide animals in the show with necessary food, drink and shelter.

"Mrs. Bessie Mumford, second vice-president of the society, said that on three occasions when she visited the show--Thursday, Friday and Sunday--the animals were not being properly cared for. Other investigating members of the society, she said, also noted the lack of proper food, drink and shelter for the animals.

"Mrs. Mumford listed the animals as approximately 10 ponies, two elephants, two bears, one lion and one St. Bernard dog.

"The charge is a misdemeanor which, upon conviction, is punishable by a maximum of one year in jail or a \$250 fine or both."

In answer to the suit of the Humane Society, Ben's lawyer, Charles Rooney, replied that none of the plaintiffs were qualified to give a professional opinion and had not had the animals examined by a veterinarian nor was there an analysis of the nutritional value of the food provided. On July 16 Judge William R. Carpenter, Court of Topeka, ruled that Davenport was innocent of failure to provide for animals in his show. The case was dropped.

Singh was a busy man on July 7. Case No. 97995 was filed in the District Court of Shawnee County, Kansas, stating, "Comes now the plaintiff and for his cause of action against the defendant above named [B. C. Davenport], alleges and states:

"1. That he is now, and at the times herein mentioned was, the owner of and entitled to the immediate possession of the following described personal property, to-wit: One female Indian elephant, known as Myrtle, weighing approximately three and one half tons.

"2. That said property is wrongfully detained from the plaintiff by the defendant, B. C. Davenport, that on the 7th day of July, 1964, plaintiff demanded of and from the defendant the possession of said property, but

defendant then and there refused to surrender the same, and still refuses so to do.

"3. That said property was not taken in execution or on an order judgment against plaintiff, or for the payment of any tax, or by virtue of any order issued in replevin, or any other means or final process.

"4. That by reason of such unlawful detention of said property by defendant, this plaintiff has sustained damages in the sum of \$3,000.00.

"WHEREFORE, plaintiff demands judgment against the defendant for the return of said property and for said damages; for costs and for such other and further relief in the premises. Leonard W. Pipkin, Attorney for Plaintiff."

At 4:20 p. m. on July 7 the plaintiff filed the following: "UNDERTAKING IN REPLEVIN.

"Whereas, the said plaintiff has filed an affidavit in this action in the office of the Clerk of said Court, to obtain an order for the delivery of the personal property in the plaintiff's petition described, in which affidavit the aggregate value of said property is stated to be Three Thousand Dollars: Now, therefore, we, Arumai Singh, as principal, and Hawkeye-Security Insurance Company of Des Moines, Iowa, as surety, hereby undertake to the said defendant, in the penal sum of Six Thousand Dollars, that the said plaintiff shall duly prosecute this action, and pay all costs and damages which may be awarded against him, and, if the said property be delivered to him, that he will return the same to the defendant if a return thereof be adjudged."

In the writ of replevin, July 7, the sheriff was given ten days in which to deliver Myrtle to Singh. The sheriff accomplished the task on the 7th and filed a claim for "Service .50. Mileage 25. Total 75."

An Order of July 27 extended the defendant's time for reply to 15 additional days.

With Davenport out on the road his attorney was granted leave on August 13, 1964, to reply to the charges "out of time."

Singh's Case No. 97995 for custody



One on Davenport's Jungle Wonders Circus trucks.

of Myrtle and his suit for back pay were consolidated under Case No. 98028.

On September 10, 1965, Davenport's lawyer requested a new trial due to inconsistencies in the submitted evidence. A new trial was set for February 4, 1965.

On January 23, 1965, Wade C. Myers, M. D., wrote a letter: "TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: "Mr. Ben Davenport recently suffered an accident involving the left hand and has developed an osteomyelitis of the third metacarpal of the left hand. He is now under treatment for this and will be unable to leave Tampa for another 6-8 weeks."

Ben's lawyer filed a Motion for Continuance on January 26, 1965, stating,

"That said defendant is presently under the care of Wade C. Myers, Jr., M. D. of Tampa, Florida; that said defendant suffered an injury to his left hand. Gangrene resulted from the infection and it was necessary to amputate his finger at the knuckle. Within six weeks additional complications occurred, making a second amputation necessary, this time removing the finger completely from the base of the hand; that the said Dr. Myers does not deem it advisable for the defendant to leave his care and that additional gangrene in the hand would result in the amputation of the hand to the wrist."

The case was continued until May 24, 1965, and subsequently to August 31, 1965, according to the following Journal Entry dated June 24, 1966.

"Now, on this 4th day of February, 1965, this matter comes on for hearing. The plaintiff appears in person and by his attorney, Leonard W.

Pipkin, Jr., and the defendant appears in person and by his attorney, Charles Rooney, Jr.

"WHEREUPON the case was partially tried, evidence presented, and the case was then recessed for further evidence.

"THIS MATTER again came on for hearing on May 24, 1965. The plaintiff appears in person and by his attorney, Leonard W. Pipkin, Jr. and the defendant appears in person and by his attorney, Charles Rooney, Jr.

"WHEREUPON evidence was again submitted, the record closed and the case submitted. The Court allowed plaintiff ten days to submit findings of fact and conclusions of law and a written brief, and the counsel for the defendant was allowed ten days thereafter to respond.

"THIS MATTER again came on for hearing on the 31st day of August, 1965. The Court finds that the time for filing of findings of all facts and conclusions of Law and briefs has long since expired. The Court, after examining the papers and pleadings filed herein and being well and fully advised in the premises, makes findings of facts as per its Memorandum Decision filed herein.

"NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS CONSIDERED, ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DIRECTED BY THE COURT that the plaintiff herein is hereby awarded possession of one female Indian elephant known as Myrtle, or if possession cannot be obtained, then alternatively is awarded the sum of \$3,000.00 from the defendant or his securities. The costs herein are taxed against the defendant. DAVID PRAGER, Judge of the District Court."

Time to appeal was extended to May 13, 1966, but by then Ben Davenport was dead.

The conclusion of Case 97995 came on August 5, 1966, with the following order:

"The Court finds that B. B. and T. J. Curry have paid the sum of \$3,000.00 to the Clerk of the District Court and that said sum should be paid to Leonard W. Pipkin, Jr., the attorney for the plaintiff herein, Armai Singh.

"IT IS THEREFORE BY THE COURT ORDERED, ADJUDGED

AND DECREED that the sum of \$3,000.00 be paid by the Clerk of the District Court of Shawnee County, Kansas, on the execution on the redelivery bond herein, to Leonard W. Pipkin, Jr., attorney for plaintiff Armai Singh."

How much did Singh receive?

The day Myrtle was returned to Davenport [July 9] was the day I made his acquaintance. Ben was in a jovial, triumphant mood, nothing like the angry, harassed showman I saw on the first two days of the stand. He was sitting outside his trailer with a drink in his hand and smiling at the world when I introduced myself. He brought out another chair and invited me to sit with him. For nearly two weeks I listened to the tales of a superb story-teller. Every evening about nine o'clock Ben would conclude the stories with the same remark, "One time I had a contract put out on a guy in Chicago . . .," his voice trailing off as he went inside the trailer. I always suspected a put-on, but I have no way of proving the truth or falsity of his statement. He always refused to discuss it.

Benjamin C. Davenport was born in Friendly, West Virginia, on March 13, 1899, the son of Benjamin Colston Davenport and Elizabeth Jane Parker. His parents wanted him to be preacher and in accordance with their wishes Ben spent one semester at Methodist College in Delaware, Ohio. He dropped out of school in 1914 and joined a circus. Ben would have been an outstanding TV evangelist, but unfortunately the career had not yet reached the big time.

Ben prospered in the circus business and put the profits back into his show. He told me several times about coming out of Canada with \$250,000 hidden in the walls of his private railroad car. He had great plans for the money, but when it came time to prepare for the next season he discovered that his wife, Eva Billings, had lost it all gambling in Gonzales, Texas.

Another Canadian tale concerned a railroad freight car on a siding next to the show train. During the night Ben had the car paint-

ed and coupled to the Dailey train.

After the death of Eva in 1958 Ben married Jean, the widow of Terrell Jacobs and the mother of Darrell (4) and Dawes (2) Jacobs, aka, Charles and John, aka, Termite and Gopher. Ben adopted both boys. Jean was an impressive woman, both physically and mentally attractive.

I was standing on the lot one day talking to Gopher when the bus from the Topeka Public Library arrived. The driver plugged into an electrical outlet. Gopher, who had worked concessions all his life, asked me, "What's that?" "A Bookmobile," I answered. After a pause Gopher asked, "How do they make any money with that?"

Ben was proud of his ability at short changing. One day, to demonstrate his ability, we went to the A & P supermarket. Ben was in line just ahead of me at the checkout counter with a cart full of groceries. Ben put a 20 on the counter, no he changed it to 10, then a five, then a twenty, back and forth the bills flew until the checkout girl was confused to the point where she probably could not have spelled her name.

When he finished he had a load of groceries and at least \$5.00 of A & P money. I, too, was confused.

One evening Ben put a large snake around his neck and collected a crowd to hear his bally. He urged the crowd to come down close. In the front, pressed up against the stage were three boys about 10 years old. Ben began his spiel but stopped abruptly. He handed the snake to the boys in the front row and told them to hold it until he finished. It was a tremendous event for the saucer-eyed boys who probably still talk about it.

Semi-trailer used by Gopher Davenport's Jungle Wonders Circus in 1979.



On July 13 Ben moved to a different shopping center on the east side of Topeka. On his last night in Topeka a veterinarian castrated the ponies and Ben fed the testicles to a noisy, happy lion. The next morning the show moved to Kansas City.

During the prolonged legal maneuvering Myrtle disappeared. Officially Myrtle was under contract to a show touring Canada. Ben told me privately that Myrtle had disappeared into the jungles of Florida. "The police can't tell one elephant from another."

A feature of Ben's show was a wrestling bear. Ben was the opponent of the toothless, clawless animal whose strength was several times that of his foe. When the bear became too rough Ben would break away and quickly hand it a bottle of sugar water. The bear would stop, sit on its haunches and drink from the bottle to the amusement of the crowd.

In 1965 the bear finally achieved revenge. During the match the toothless bear crushed one of Ben's fingers, necessitating surgery to combat the gangrene that developed.

Ben died at Ruston, Louisiana, May 6, 1966, at the age of 67, of a heart attack following a bout with the wrestling bear. He was buried in Showman's Rest in Sarasota, Florida, in a casket that he insisted must be painted a bright red. And it was.

The last time I saw Ben was May 24, 1965, when he appeared before the District Court. Ben came to my house at lunch time and we fed him the best we could without prior notice of his coming. He was an eager eater.

Ben has remained one of my favorite people. His smile was magic, warming everyone who saw him. It was my belief that Ben could count a person's money while it was still in the sucker's pocket. If he ever took advantage of me, I was too dumb to know it. Ben Davenport was a lovable old rascal.

Research funded in part by grants from Wolfe's Camera & Video Inc. Topeka, Kansas.

Mr. Lincoln, Senator Douglas and the Circus

By Stuart Thayer

One of the limitations to civic activities in small-town America in the nineteenth century was the lack of a place for large meetings. Dances could be held on barn floors, hence our term "barn dance." Churches and schools were sites of public gatherings, but they were small buildings. If an event needed space for 1,000 people, it could only be held in the open air.

There are some examples of the use of circus tents and seating in cases where a show happened to be performing in a town where a large public gathering was to take place. Stickney's New Orleans Circus played Memphis, Tennessee, from October 31 to November 3, 1848. A notice in the *Daily Appeal* of October 31 said, "Messrs. Stanton and Gentry [local pols] will address the citizens of Memphis and others under the circus canvas which Mr. Stickney has kindly offered for the occasion."

In 1856, the Rivers & Derious Circus put the following announcement in the September 24 Huntingdon, Pennsylvania, *Journal*: [The] pavilion can be had free of charge for political meetings on the day of exhibition from 4:30 to 6:30. No notice is required to be given for permission."

From these instances we would project other such tent use, though our research has not disclosed any. There are also several examples of circuses lending their bands to local parades, and even funerals.

The most famous series of events involving circus tents occurred in 1858 during the Senate race between Abraham Lincoln and Steven Douglas in Illinois. To set the scene for the subsequent meshing of politics and show business, we have to

go back to the mid-summer floods in Missouri in that year. Spalding & Rogers and Levi J. North were in opposition in the state in May, 1858. On May 3, Spalding & Rogers was in Columbia, nine days ahead of North's appearance there. Rocheport next day was the same. In Independence, Spalding was six days ahead on the 18th, and in Kansas City a week ahead on the 19th.

Manager C. J. Rogers then took the circus on a tour of six Kansas towns, and when he returned to Missouri, at Parkville on the 28th, found himself day and dating the Levi North show.

An 1861 cartoon by Henry Louis Stephens in *Vanity Fair* showing Lincoln balancing his hopes for peace against the firing on Fort Sumpter. Douglas is the figure at right. Author's collection.

The same thing happened in Leavenworth on the 31st. About this time the Missouri River was flooding to the point that it was impassable in the western portion of the state. Both shows headed east as fast as they could, North by land to St. Louis, and Spalding & Rogers by railroad to Hannibal.

The bad roads, and the competition were too much for North's finances, and on July 5, he put into Quincy, Illinois, to reorganize. More on that in a moment.

Joel E. Warner was the assistant manager, under Charles Rogers, of the Spalding & Rogers troupe. It went into Iowa and Wisconsin, down to Chicago, and then into downstate Illinois, with an eye to the crowds being drawn by the Senate race. Warner arranged to have each candidate use the circus tent at least once.

Senator Douglas was to speak in Lincoln, Illinois on September 4, which was also circus day. Spalding & Rogers' advertisement in the *Logan County News* had this trailer: "The daylight performance at 11 and 1/2 will conclude before Judge Douglas' speech for whose use the pavilion of the circus has been tendered to the Committee of Arrangements.

According to Warner, a big wagon was put in the tent when the matinee ended. On it was placed the concert stage, for a speaker's platform. The sidewalls were "appropriately draped." Five thousand people listened to the "little Giant" for two hours.

"Gloom pallied the spirits of the Democrats the following morning," Warner related, "for every Republican newspaper within reach of the telegraph appeared



PROF. LINCOLN IN HIS GREAT FEAT OF BALANCING

with flaming headlines, scoring Douglas for hiring out to a circus."

The *Chicago Press and Tribune*, for example printed, "Douglas Following a Circus," with a sub-head saying, "Novel Acrobatic Performances." The article asked would he be the rider, the acrobat, or the clown, and decided that he would be the contortionist, since he had come down on both sides of so many issues.

Abraham Lincoln was to give a speech in Hillsboro, Illinois, on September 9. This, too, was a circus date, and Warner had arranged with the local Republican committee to use the tent. However, after the comments on Douglas' use of the facility, the locals said, "No tents for us. This is too good a thing on Douglas. We've arranged to hold our meeting in the grove," as Warner recalled it.

The grove was about half-a-mile beyond the circus lot and everyone--six or eight thousand people--passed the circus on their way to hear Lincoln. Warner had received the committee's promise to begin the program at noon, and they said it would finish at two p.m.

"The speaking was delayed half-an-hour," Warner reported, "and I listened to Mr. Lincoln for a while, and then went to the tents to prepare for the crowd. A few minutes before two o'clock, the feature of our parade was drawn up to the grove, ready to allure the crowd to the tents when the speaking closed. It was an immense cage containing a woman surrounded by a dozen large pythons and anacondas, drawn by forty horses driven by a single man [Major Derth]. Atop the cage sat a big band.

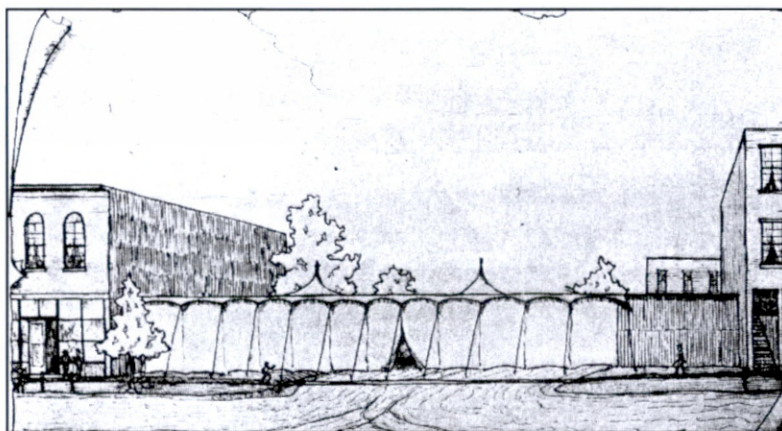
"Two o'clock came. Mr. Lincoln seemed no nearer his conclusion than when he began.

"I must have the crowd," I demanded of the master of ceremonies.

"Oh, give us a few more minutes," he begged.

"I'll give you ten."

"Watch in hand, I waited. When the time was up, the rail-splitter was



Drawing of "The Wigwam," as the temporary 1860 building in Decatur was called. The canvas covering was quite likely borrowed from Van Amburgh & Co. From *History of Macon County* by Mable E. Richmond. Decatur, 1930.

still rending the air with his eloquence. Evidently, he was just becoming seriously and earnestly interested in his subject. If our show was to get any of these people, it must get them before sundown.

"I stepped to the road and waved my hand. The woman shook up the serpents. The band struck up a lively air. The procession moved and only the committee and a few personal friends were left to hear the eloquent peroration for which Abe Lincoln was famous.

"Our tents were not half large enough for that crowd."

In addition to all the individual speeches which the candidates gave across the state, there were the seven face-to-face debates, which have gone down as the best remembered such events in American history. The only one involving the circus was in Quincy, Illinois, on October 13.

As we said, Levi J. North had stopped there on July 5 to reorganize after a disastrous trip through Missouri. He cut his roster from twenty to thirteen performers, and reduced the size of his tent. This made some of his seating superfluous, and he stored it in Quincy. North then set a course back to Missouri and Iowa. The Missouri River floods had abated by August, and he again went to Leavenworth, just ninety days after he'd performed there in May. The Cincinnati *Daily Commercial* characterized his troupe

as inferior, with "performances on the cheap and nasty plan."

Carl Landrum, a local Quincy historian and *Bandwagon* contributor (March-April, 1975), wrote in the *Herald-Whig* that the debate was the most important event in the history of the city. It was held in Washington

Park, the town square. One Nathan Pinkharn rented North's seating for the day, and as often happened, the seats collapsed just as the debate started. There were a number of minor injuries, but the speaking went on.

The outcome of all the debates and speeches was, as we know, a victory for Senator Douglas. But Lincoln's stature was affected to the point where, in 1860, he received the nomination for Republican candidate for President of the United States.

The state convention that nominated him as Illinois' choice was held in Decatur on May 9, 1860, and again, we're talking about the greatest event in the history of a small town (population: 2,000). A 100 x 70 building was erected for the convention. It was a wooden skeleton constructed between two brick buildings, but the funds provided for the lumber could not be stretched to include a roof. Once more, a circus came to the rescue. The contractor borrowed a tent-top and some sidewall from a show that was in the area. We believe this was the Great Van Amburgh Show, since no other circus was in Illinois at the time. Van Arnburgh played Springfield May 1, Bloomington May 5, and LaSalle May 11.

Abraham Lincoln was nominated by acclamation, became the Republican nominee at the party convention in Chicago, and went on to win the national election in November. The theatre and the circus were seldom involved with great events, except to recreate them as drama. These interludes in Illinois are the only ones we've found.

Side Lights On The Circus Business

PART SEVEN

By David W. Watt

March 29, 1913

In eighteen hundred and ninety-three which was World's Fair year, early in September two wealthy widows living in Philadelphia came to Chicago to do the World's Fair for a few weeks. As they had written me some time before, I had quarters engaged for them at the old Leland Hotel on Michigan Avenue, now the Stratford. They had only been there a few days when while at breakfast one morning their rooms were entered and diamonds worth between \$4000 and \$5000 taken. These women were Mrs. Adam Forepaugh, wife of the famous showman, and a friend of hers by the name of Kilpatrick. As they were entire strangers in Chicago, Mrs. Forepaugh telegraphed me to come on the first train, that she had been robbed. I did not receive the telegram until afternoon which was too late to get a train for Chicago until evening.

It was about ten o'clock at night when I arrived at the hotel where I found a pair of widows who had spent most of the day in crying over their loss. It was too late at night to do anything in the way of getting detectives to work, but early in the morning I went to the William A. Pinkerton Detective Agency. Mr. Pinkerton himself came over to the hotel and looked the lay of the land over. The minute he found out how the work was done he made up his mind that he knew who had done it. But they had such a start on him and while he looked at all express offices and all trains were watched both east and west, nothing came from the search for the robber. Later Mrs. Forepaugh and her friend came to Janesville to visit friends for two weeks and gave up all hopes of ever

finding their diamonds, and they were well founded, for they never did get them.

Week before last while at the banquet in Chicago one of the first men I met in the evening was "Billie" Pinkerton as he is familiarly known all over Chicago. After talking with him for a few minutes, he said "Dave, I'm awfully glad to see you for I have some news to tell you. Last November I found out to a certainty who took Mrs. Forepaugh's and Mrs. Kilpatrick's diamonds, and although I knew at the time who had done the work, before I could reach him he was surrounded by friends in New York who were ready to swear that he had not been out of the city in two months.

"This same man who took those diamonds about eight years ago committed another diamond robbery at the Palmer House, but I was notified in four or five hours after it came off, and my people caught him at Pittsburgh at 7 o'clock the next morning. His name was Horace Bacon, an old offender, and the one that I knew well at the time had done the job at the Leland Hotel twelve years or nearly that before. He was brought back to Chicago and given seven years at Joliet, but by good behavior old "Hod" Bacon, as we had known him for years, was let out. An old man and without money, he came to me in Chicago and said, 'Billie, I've

made you a world of trouble, but I am through with that kind of a life and all the relatives I have live in New York City and I would like to get back there.' I took him to the depot and got him a ticket for New York and gave him some money to buy his meals with until he would get there.

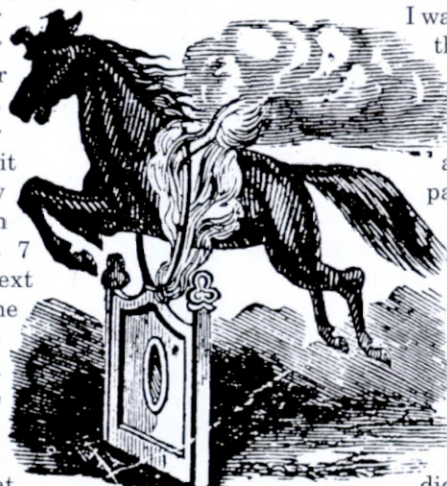
"Bacon assured me that would be the last trouble he would ever cause me. This was something like two and a half years ago that I sent him to New York, and I never heard from him after that till I received a hurry-up call to a West Side hospital saying there was a dying man wanted to see me. I hurried to the hospital, was taken up in the ward and there to my surprise was Hod Bacon lying on his death bed.

"He said, Billie, I have only a little while to live, the doctor tells me, and

I want to tell you a few things before I die.

The one that will probably interest you the most is about Mrs. Forepaugh's and Mrs. Kilpatrick's diamonds taken from the Leland Hotel World's Fair year. Old Hod Bacon said, 'I was the man who took them.' I said to him, 'What did you do with the

money. 'Oh,' he said, 'You know we don't get much for those things. We have to sell them to men of our kind, a little different from us, only they are men who have not got the courage to go and get them. Before I could do another job my money was gone.' He told me of two or three



other robberies which I well knew he and his associates had done, but never could convict them. It was late in the evening when I got through taking down what he wanted to tell me and I bade him goodbye and late that night Hod Bacon passed away."

Mr. Pinkerton said that Hod Bacon was naturally one of the brightest and shrewdest men he had ever met, but when he was a boy he went wrong and had kept wrong all his life. He said, "About two years ago one of my closest friends in Chicago left to make his permanent home in Portland, Oregon. As I corresponded with him regularly he had been writing for several months for me to pack my grip and come out to Portland and stay a few weeks with him. I finally made up my mind to go and a couple of days later arrived in Portland.

"We were walking down to his office one morning when he said, 'Billie, I think we stand a good show to get the Ringling circus to make their headquarters in Portland for the next ten years.' He said, 'We have a large vacant factory building with a few acres of ground in the suburbs here which would make an admirable place for this show during the winter with the addition of a few buildings. John Ringling is here now and we took him out yesterday and showed him the plant and he said if we would give them free rent for ten years and \$5000 in cash to add some new buildings that they would come to Portland and winter the show every winter for ten years. He said they would want a lease drawn up with \$2000 of the \$5000 paid in cash and a guarantee for the other \$3000 as soon as the show got into winter quarters.' He said, 'A few of us men are going to pay the \$2000 in the office of a certain bank this afternoon at 2 o'clock and guarantee the other \$3000.'"

Mr. Pinkerton said, "I told them I thought it was a good plan for Portland to winter such a show and would mean a great deal to the city. However, it did not strike me as a very plausible story. I soon made an excuse and got away from my friend and telegraphed to Baraboo and Chicago, asking the whereabouts of John Ringling. They got me an

answer from both places saying John Ringling was in New York and would be there for two weeks. I then got busy, got one of our men from the office in Portland, and told him to be at the corner of the bank at a quarter to two and I would join him at two o'clock sharp.

"While the businessmen were planning in the back room of the bank, my man and myself walked unceremoniously into the office and I said, 'I would like to speak with John Ringling a minute.' The man who had represented himself to be John Ringling rose to his feet and said, 'That's my name. "What would you



John Ringling, the youngest brother. Pfening Archives

like." I said to him, 'My name is Pinkerton. I want you to get your coat and hat and come with me. You're my prisoner.'

"The bankers and businessmen pushed back in their chairs and looked with amazement at me as I walked out with the man, but the most surprised one of all was my friend who was one of the men who was going to furnish a part of the \$2000; and although I stayed there for some two weeks after, it was some days before my friend would admit but what I should have let him in on it and not take him so by surprise. We convicted the man and he was sent to prison for two years.

"Now, Dave," he said, "This was not detective work, but I simply happened to be there on the ground."

It is experiences like these coming from a great detective like William A. Pinkerton with a pleasant face and gentle voice that make good listeners

of people who naturally like to talk a little themselves. While we visited there for an hour and a half and while the doors of the banquet were nearly an hour late in opening, it came too soon to suit me, for in all that time I was glad to be the listener.

From eighteen and eighty to eighteen and ninety-one I had done more or less business with the Pinkerton agency in making contracts for the Adam Forepaugh show; for every year we would have one of their detectives with the show so that I know William A. Pinkerton and his brother Robert, who died about seven years ago, very well. But at the banquet two weeks ago was the first time I had seen Billie Pinkerton to talk with him for twenty years and the long visit that I had with him at the banquet repaid me several times over for the trip made.

In my time as ticket agent and treasurer of the Adam Forepaugh show, we employed four different men from the Pinkerton agency in Chicago and Mr. Pinkerton told me that only one of the four were living. A man by the name of W. H. Henderson who was the last one employed with the show is still living and makes his home in Philadelphia. I recollect Mr. Pinkerton's father who was founder of the business more than fifty years ago. In all these years they have kept the standard of the business and in their work have been as high class as was possible for them to have it.

In the middle eighties a young man by the name of W. D. Coxey, who had been employed more or less for a few years as a newspaper reporter, came to the Forepaugh show one day to do newspaper work back with the show. Mr. Coxey stayed with the show some years but later went into both newspaper and magazine work, writing for different newspapers and magazines and soon became a writer of some note.

April 5, 1913

Many Janesville and Rock county people remember well two shows that visited Janesville at different times—one the B. E. Wallace Show and the other the Hagenbeck. These two shows, while not the largest on

the road, were recognized by the public as two of the finest that ever exhibited in Janesville. The Wallace show has been on the road for many years and the Hagenbeck, which was largely of trained animals which came over to this country about World's Fair year a few years later, was launched out as a circus and menagerie of the highest quality.

After being on the road a few years the Wallace and the Hagenbeck shows were combined as one under the management of Mr. Wallace and one of the Hagenbecks. Some years ago Mr. Wallace bought the Hagenbeck show and for a number of years has been the owner and manager of both shows and had winter quarters at Peru, Indiana, a short distance below the city on the banks of the Wabash River. These shows combined made not only one of the largest but one of the finest shows ever put on the road, and without any question, their trained animals were the finest that this country had ever seen.

After Mr. Wallace took over the Hagenbeck show, he enlarged his winter quarters and up to the time the great floods struck them only a few days ago it was said to be one of the finest winter quarters owned by any showman in this county. But the floods came with such force that they soon surrounded the winter quarters and all the men could do was to loosen the elephants that were chained up and get them out of the buildings as fast as possible.

The men well knew that the elephants could swim to shore at any reasonable distance and this was their object in turning them loose, thinking they would naturally swim across to dry land. But they would go out into the swift current of the river, and finding the river very cold, they would turn back and try to get into



The Great Wallace Shows in 1902. Pfening Archives.

their winter quarters, which had been their home for so many years. Of the twelve fine trained elephants eight of them perished in the cold water, the men being able to save only four of them.

They got a few of the trained animals onto shore, but as for the most of them, they were carried down the river to their deaths. While this will cripple the Wallace Shows, it will only be for a time as he already has agents shipping animals into Peru to take their places.

I had a letter from Mr. Wallace Wednesday morning telling me of his loss and that his engagement in St. Louis, where he was to open the 12th of this month, had been canceled as well as others but that the show would open as good as new the 26th of April in Peru.

The money loss to Mr. Wallace will not cripple him, as he is a wealthy man and has several acres of fine

The 1913 flood of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Peru winter quarters drown this elephant. Pfening Archives.



farm land near his home town as well as a large interest in a bank in Peru and more or less business property in that city.

During Mr. Wallace's career in his hobby, he has always been able, or at least for many years, to turn out the finest parade of its size that ever was put on the

streets with the combination of the Hagenbeck trained animals of all kinds added to his already fine show made an exhibition of the first class and such as could only be seen with the Wallace Shows.

He said that his loss in the way of horses, elephants and cage animals, to say nothing of the loss to his winter quarters, would probably foot up to \$150,000. He said one of the first relief cars to be received in Peru was sent from Chicago by the Showmen's League of America, an organization less than three weeks old. While this car was sent for the relief of the show people connected with the Wallace and Hagenbeck Shows, very much of it went for the relief of other needy people. The car arrived there at two o'clock on Sunday afternoon and was all unloaded and distributed by dark.

A young man by the name of Will Hart who was born and raised in Janesville but who had been running the finest hotel in Peru for some years, was on hand and with the help of some others laid aside all red tape and saw that the needy ones were looked after as soon as the car arrived. As Janesville sent a substantial check last Monday, Peru will long remember that Chicago and Janesville were among the first to send them relief. Mr. Wallace said the waters had gone down as fast as they came and already the work of cleaning up the city is well under way.

I want to tell you a little story which W. F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill," told at the banquet three weeks ago in Chicago. This is only one of many as they kept him telling stories for

more than an hour and a half.

This, he said, was his first experience at a social event of any kind. It happened along in the late sixties after he had been fighting Indians for some years on the frontier under the direction of General Phil Sheridan, who later became his warm personal friend. General Sheridan realized the good work that he had been doing and wrote him a letter saying that he might leave the front and come on to Chicago and be his guest for a few days.

He said: "I got what little money I could get together, bought me a suit of clothes, the best that I could in that part of the country, and started for a visit to Chicago. Up to this time I never had been east of the Mississippi River. I arrived in Chicago and after a day or two of sightseeing around the city Gen. Sheridan and his wife told me that they were going to give a reception for me a certain evening.

"The day before this reception was to come off Gen. Sheridan said to me, 'Cody, you will have to have a dress suit and a pair of white kid gloves.' I said to him, 'I can readily see that I should have some kind of a pair of gloves to cover up these rough hands of mine, but no dress suit for me.'

"But the general insisted that I must have a dress suit. About this time Mike Sheridan, a brother of the general's who was living there, said to me, 'Well, I will take a horse and buggy and we will go up town. I know where there's a man who rents dress suits.' I was in much better shape to rent a farm than to buy one so Mike's proposition looked a good one to me. We were soon on our way up town. I bought a pair of gloves and rented a dress suit and the next evening after they got me all dressed up, I felt as though I was in a plaster cast. In those days they wore the pants tight fitting and those that I had being a little too small for me, I was afraid to sit down for fear something would give way, and every time I shook hands with a guest, I expected the gloves to rip.

"In those days there were no round dances and Mrs.

Sheridan brought a lady friend of her's around and introduced her to me and said that we were to dance the first cotillion together. I managed to get through with it pretty well, for I have danced with the cowboys more or less in the west, but after it was over I commenced looking for Mike for he didn't seem to be among the guests and later I found him down in the basement of the house smoking a cigar.

"I said to him: 'Mike, I cannot stand this torture any longer. I would rather fight Indians for forty-eight hours without a letup on the frontier than to go back upstairs and dance one more cotillion.' Mike came to my rescue and said: 'I will slip upstairs the back way and get your clothes, bring them down and you can stay here with me till the party is over.'

"This I did, but of course I was called on the carpet in the morning for I had brought disgrace upon my host and hostess. After I had explained to them that it was impossible for me to go any farther, they forgave me and this was my first experience in society in a dress suit. But as time went on and especially after I came back and started in show business it was not long before I caught the dress suit disease, and from that time on it was an easy matter for me to go out in company and dress and feel like other people."

He told us many other stories that were interesting, at least to his old friends, and I may think of something more along this line to tell you later.

The Burr Robbins big top and marquee. Circus World Museum collection.

April 12, 1913

In eighteen-eighty the Burr Robbins show was a railroad show and opened the season early in May. We had more or less rain and bad weather early in the season and while we had a brand new canvas for that year, Mr. Robbins made up his mind that the old one would be good-enough till the weather was settled.

Along about the middle of June we were billed to show in Milwaukee for two days which was on Monday and Tuesday. Something like the week before we were to be in Milwaukee, Mr. Robbins notified me that the new canvas would be shipped to Milwaukee and put up there for the first time. He said, "Above all places that I want to make a nice showing it is there." Up to that time we had never showed in so large a city and the impression that we made there, if a good one, would mean a lot to the show in the northwest, which country we were going directly to after leaving Milwaukee.

I was then the manager of the show and was supposed to see that everything was right on the inside before time to open the doors. I said to Mr. Robbins, "Leave that to me and I will show Milwaukee the finest show for the size of it that they ever looked at."

We arrived in Milwaukee on a Sunday morning. I had several gallons of paint on hand and had notified the boss canvasman days before that I would expect him to furnish me at least ten or twelve painters as I must paint all the center poles, side poles and quarter poles. The painters were soon at work and the ring bank was thrown up. I had let a contract for about eight loads of sawdust and the loads they brought were almost the size of a small house.

Our ring performance was the finest that any show the size of the Burr Robbins had ever given. Our principal bareback rider was Charlie Fish, the finest trick rider in the world, and the lady equestrienne was Helen Cook, and they were two of the best riders that money could hire. The bal-

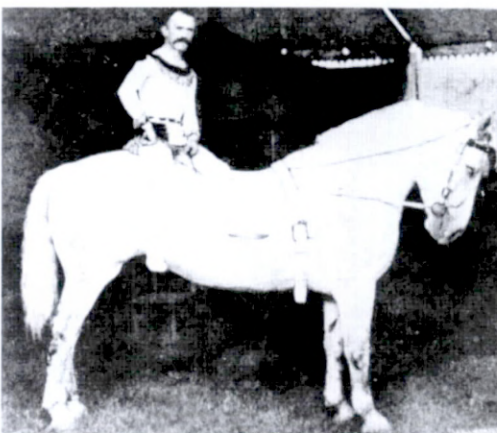


ance of the show was high class and while we only had one ring, the platform [stage] when the show opened Monday was a sight worth seeing.

All the poles inside were painted snow white, the eight loads of white sawdust covered the ground for a depth of two inches everywhere. I had ordered four large urns of plants to decorate the four centers of the platform. When Burr Robbins entered the show Monday afternoon with some guests he was as proud of it as P. T. Barnum or Adam Forepaugh ever were of Jumbo or the ten thousand dollar beauty. But he knew that to decorate the show in such a manner had cost some money. I had bought several dozen large flags and, while Burr Robbins was the proudest man in Milwaukee that day over the appearance of the show, yet he could not wait until he called me onto the carpet and said, "This is the last time that I will ever take the limit off as to how much money you can spend to dress up the show."

But this made the hit of the lifetime in the show business. The Milwaukee papers came out that night and said that Milwaukee had never seen a cleaner and finer show for the size of it and would probably never see one again. They all gave the show the finest write-up that was possible, and as it was copied all over the western country; it gave the show a prestige in a city like Milwaukee that was worth many thousand dollars to the Burr Robbins show for the balance of the season. Many times later in the season Burr Robbins said to me, "The Milwaukee money that you spent, while it looked like a good deal for a two-days' stand, I do think was the cheapest advertising that the show ever had."

In those days there were only two great bareback riders and they were Charles Fish and James Robinson. Charlie Fish had ridden all over the world and had more than one engagement for months at a time when his salary was \$500 per week. He was what was known as a forward and back somersault rider and thousands of times when he would be turning a somersault on a horse he would slip and go off onto the ground on purpose just to show the people



Charles W. Fish, well known bareback rider. Pfening Archives.

how he could get back. He could leave the ring at almost any angle and leap onto the horse's back and stay there. To the average audience that was the best act that Charlie Fish did.

James Robinson retired from the business with plenty of money along about the middle eighties and for a time made his home in Louisville, Kentucky, where he had a brother-in-law who was a wealthy dry goods merchant, and Robinson, for some years, it was said, was a silent partner in the business. About this time we showed in Louisville with the Adam Forepaugh show. Jim Robinson's old ring horse was at that time fourteen years old, but considered the finest ring horse in the business. A young lady rider, one of the best in the country, although comparatively new, by the name of Ashton, was anxious to buy a good ring horse and when we got to Louisville she said to me, "If you can possibly buy Jim Robinson's ring horse I would like to have him. You can say to Mr. Robinson that I will pay him a good price for the horse, that I will take fine care of him; and when he is too old to work, I will see that he has a good home for the balance of his life."

On Sunday morning when we arrived in Louisville I looked up Jim Robinson and told him that Miss Ashton would like to buy his ring horse and while Mr. Robinson had expected to keep him as long as he lived, I finally bought him for Miss Ashton and paid Mr. Robinson \$1,200. He was said to be the most perfect gaited horse that ever went

into the ring and Ashton kept him for many years.

Jim Robinson is now an old man. Only a few years ago he spent the summer over at Delavan Lake. Among circus people the world over, Delavan, Wisconsin, has been known for more than forty years as the home of many show people that have been more or less famous in the business. There were four of the Buckley boys who for so many years were connected with the big Barnum hippodrome, W. C. Coup, the Castelllos, George Madden and many others that I might mention, but they are all dead now and are buried in the little cemetery at Delavan.

It is seldom that a circus visits Delavan to this day that they don't take time to take their band and march to the cemetery and decorate the graves of the old showmen whom they knew years ago, for Delavan, Wisconsin, was the only town in the western country that could boast of being the winter quarters of a circus more than fifty years ago, and that was the old Mabie show which was bought by Adam Forepaugh in the fall of '63.

April 19, 1913

Trouping days for the circus folk have begun. With Ringlings in Chicago, Barnum and Bailey in New York, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill in Philadelphia, the 101 Ranch in St. Louis and minor shows playing one town dates through the south and west, the summer campaign is on. Nowadays these shows travel by rail with palatial cars, fine equipment and think nothing of a jump of a hundred odd miles from one show lot to another. How different it was years ago.

Back in the days of the sixties and seventies all travel was done by road, short hauls at night from town to town, just as few miles as could be managed and still draw a good crowd to the next performance. The shows themselves were small and not the monster aggregations, tented cities as they are of today. The opening date was always at the hometown of the show at its winter quarters, and the opening day was a gala time for the entire community.

Perhaps there is no one little community in any state where so many circus people of the past decades are buried as at Delavan in Walworth county. Delavan is dear to the hearts of the old time circus folk, the circus people of the days of the wagon shows before the great circus combines. In the early days the period of the good old fashioned one ring show with perhaps a platform, a menagerie, a new feature, often separate entirely from the real circus, circus folk had hard work. They were forced to take long hauls, travel by night on the tops of wagons or in covered vehicles. When a wagon was stalled in the mud, the elephants were brought up and pulled and tugged the heavy truck out of the hole and then the march continued.

At one time no less than five of these early day circuses operated out of Delavan. The old Van Amburgh show, Mabie Brothers, later to become a part of the famous Forepaugh circus, Buckley and Babcock, Holland and Mosher and Jim Melville's Australian circus. It was the heyday of the small wagon show and Delavan had its share.

Today it's the scene of their last resting place and the shrine of the worshippers to the memory of the old timers. Mrs. Frances E. Middleton of Chicago, wife of the famous museum man, has a handsome mausoleum which cost \$8,000 and covers two lots in the little cemetery. In fact the whole cemetery is dotted with graves of performers who in their lives were premiers in the business. I do not think there is a city in the United States where so many old showmen and women have found their last resting place.

In fact, for many years Delavan was circus headquarters for the whole northwest and for the east as well. Some of the best known aggregations started from this little village and their small beginnings can still be seen today in the mammoth Barnum & Bailey show and others that are still fondly remembered by

the boys of the days they flourished in.

There are also a large number of old time performers who are spending their last days at this little Wisconsin city and will find their last resting place in the beautiful cemetery there. Both Ed and Jerry Mabie, whose circus operations date away back to 1844, fill graves in Spring Grove. Matthew Buckley, the famous clown and vaulter who had been apprenticed to Beatty in London and came to this country with Cook in 1836, is buried there and so is his wife who long years ago was a well known circus performer. John Holland, whose two sons, George and

E. G. Holland, both well known circus men, still reside in Delavan, sleeps in the same cemetery. John Holland came to this country from London with the Ravel troupe of pantomimers. Ed Buckley and his brother Harry, both followers of the Mabie circuses, lie in the same place and

here, too, is the grave of Joe McMahon who while wintering a circus at Wichita was shot and killed by a big sheriff who came up out of Texas to

arrest one of Buckley's men. George Madden, son of the old man Madden, the clown, is also among the circus dead of this town. Here also rests Mary Ann, the wife of George Madden. Johnny Holland, Jr., an attache of the Mabies, is among the numbers and so is Steve Babcock who with Harry Buckley started a circus from Delavan in 1857. W. C. Coup, who began his circus career as a sideshow barker and whose name will forever be linked with that of P. T. Barnum, lies in a well kept lot in Delavan.

The history of the great aggregation that was known throughout the entire world as Barnum's show originated in this same town. In 1869 [1870], W. C. Coup and Dan Castello started from Delavan with a small wagon show. They shipped on a lake boat at Kenosha and went around

the lakes winding up in the copper country where they cleared up \$40,000. Coup came back to Delavan where he originated a scheme to get the name of Barnum and to use it in connection with a big show. He offered the famed easterner 25 percent of all gate receipts for the mere use of his name. E. G. Holland, who is now the city marshal of Delavan, was with this show when it showed at State and Twenty-second streets, Chicago.

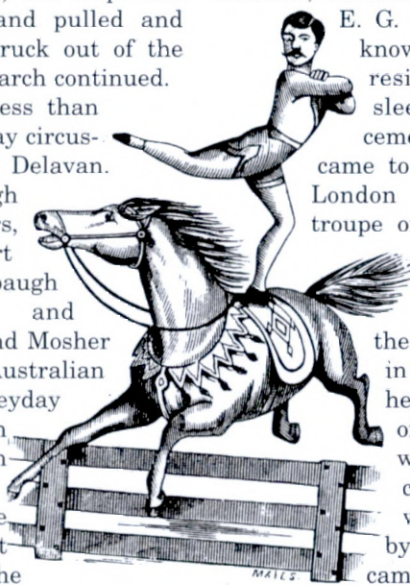
The Mabie show afterwards was consolidated with the Adam Forepaugh show in 1865 and formed the nucleus for this showman's successful career. One of the famous men in the show business that originally hailed from Delavan who never owned a show of his own but whose name is dear to all showmen of this and past generations is Delavan the former boss hostler of the Ringlings. Delavan came from the town he took the name of and the name by which he is known to the circus world. No man was more sincerely grieved after his death by circus men as a whole than Delavan.

April 26, 1913

In eighteen hundred and eighty seven, which was the first year that the Buffalo Bill show went to Europe, it was along about the first of April when they were to leave New York on a boat chartered especially for the purpose. They were scheduled to leave New York at 10:30, but early in the day the two hundred Indians or more which they were taking with them became separated and commenced to imbibe freely of their kind of "fire water," as they called it, at the different saloons surrounding Castle Garden.

The Adam Forepaugh and the Barnum shows were combined and showing in Madison Square Garden at the time, and nearly everybody connected with the two shows were down at the wharf to see the Buffalo Bill show off. Hundreds of us were there before nine in the morning, and at that time there were not more than half of the Indians that could be found.

We formed small squads and started out through that district looking for the Indians and every few min-



utes they would come in with from one to three Indians and run them up the gangplank into the boat. Guards were there to watch them and see that they did not get off again, but it was well after the noon hour before they were all gathered in.

While this was Col. Cody's first appearance in Europe, he had been well advertised and opened for a season at the amphitheatre in London and soon after the opening it became the fad of the aristocrats of London and the surrounding country to take a drive in the overland coach which was drawn by eight mules. But all these people seemed to think that the only man to "hold the whip," as they called it, was Col. Cody; so there was nothing for the Colonel to do but to mount the big overland coach and give his guests a drive after the eight mules. The fad soon spread over the country and many of the crowned heads and leaders of the society were there day after day to take a ride on the overland coach with Col. Cody as driver.

This did not particularly please the Colonel, for his feature of the great show that he took over there was his great "shooting"; and to grab up the heavy lines over the eight mules and drive them four or five times at top speed around the ring and bring them to a standstill and then pick up his rifle and attempt to break glass balls was not altogether to his liking.

One evening after the show had been there for some weeks a distinguished gentleman came in all alone and insisted on having a ride in the coach. Buffalo Bill finally decided to give him a ride, and his highness was placed in the hind seat of the coach all alone, and Col. Cody started the mules on a run around the track. They were well trained and from a dead run he was often known to stop them still in a few feet.

His highness wore a tall silk hat and after making three or four turns of the hippodrome track, Col. Cody put his foot on the brake and pulled up and hollered, "Whoa," to the mules, and in a few feet they were at a standstill. But they had thrown their guest head first into the overland coach with his silk hat drawn down over his ears. When his friends



Col. William F. Cody and a group of Indians in Venice, Italy. Pfening Archives.

opened the door and helped him out one of them said to him, "Your highness, you should have stayed on the hind seat." His highness remarked, "I was to start with him and stayed as long as I could. Did they run against anything that made them stop so suddenly?" Col. Cody said this was one of the aristocracy who never came back again for another ride.

The show remained in that country several years, toured all over Europe and as the saying goes, made a world of money. Buffalo Bill carries many trophies of different kinds that were given him by crowned heads in all parts of Europe.

Only a few weeks ago the old ex-champion prize fighter, John L. Sullivan, was in California for the purpose of refereeing a prize fight. After the audience had all got into the amphitheatre and about time for the preliminary bouts to commence, John L. Sullivan stepped onto the platform and he said, "You have all heard the news of the terrible floods in Ohio and Indiana and I think this would be a good place for us to take up a collection to be forwarded immediately to the sufferers. I am going to appoint six men to pass around the audience and solicit your contributions, and I will take care of the people in the boxes at the ringside."

He appointed the six men and started through the crowd and then took his silk hat, put \$50 in it as his contribution and started down through the audience in the boxes nearest the stage. When they got all through they counted the money, and

the contribution amounted to a little over \$3,000, which was turned over to the proper authorities the next morning and immediately forwarded to the flood sufferers in Indiana and Ohio.

"We don't carry postage stamps," John L. Sullivan in a short speech before he started the men through the audience said to them, "for your small change, and anyway you had better keep that for street cars. Give us only big bills, for these flood sufferers will need thousands of dollars."

I think it was the same evening that Sarah Bernhardt, the great actress, was in Salt Lake City with her own company, when along about the middle of the performance, she stepped in front of the curtain and announced that the next morning bright and early she would be on a certain street corner selling newspapers for the benefit of the flood sufferers, and she said, "You can rest assured that I will be there as early and as late as any of the rest of the 'newsies.'"

She was there bright and early and it goes without saying that hundreds of people bought newspapers of Sarah Bernhardt and paid well for them, for many a one wanted to lay them away as souvenirs and to have it to say in years to come "there is the newspaper that I bought of Sarah Bernhardt at such and such a corner when she was selling them for the benefit of the flood sufferers in Ohio and Indiana." What the contribution was perhaps no one knows, but when she was through selling her newspapers she turned in upwards of \$800.

I mention this simply to show you that show people in all different lines are always ready to put in their time and give up their money for those in need. But this was done in many states all over the country. Theatrical companies, moving picture shows and all kinds of amusement places gave a certain percentage of their day or evening receipts to the sufferers in the flooded districts.

May 3, 1913

In eighteen hundred and seventy five there was a man with the Burr

Robbins show by the name of Miles Orton whom many of Janesville's older citizens will remember as he made his home here for a couple of years. Miles Orton was a feature with the Burr Robbins show for two years and was a bareback rider. Mr. Orton, while one of the best riders in the business, differed from Charlie Fish of James Robinson, who were the champions in their day, for he did what was called a carrying act. He had a son Claude whom he carried on his head around the ring. He was a high salaried man, and after two years with the Burr Robbins show left there and joined one of the larger shows where I think he remained about two years longer. By this time he had saved quite a snug sum of money and the next I heard of him was in the spring of '80, and he had launched out a small wagon show of his own known as Miles Orton's All Feature Circus and Menagerie.

His principal clown for his first year in the business was Al G. Fields. Fields was then a young man and this was one of his first years in the business, but as many of you know, the Al G. Fields Minstrels were famous not only in this country but all over Europe as one of the finest in the world.

In those days with the wagon shows at times the drives were long and the roads bad, and it was difficult to carry oil enough over the road to light the show in the smaller towns where it was impossible to buy oil. I recollect once at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, they ran out of oil; and it was impossible to buy it in the town so they took six inch boards, bored holes in them and the evening performance was given by candle-light.

But before they had time to do all this Al G. Fields the clown got hold of an old silk hat, put a hole in the top, lit a candle and put it in the hole and came out before the audience and said that if he could get the protection of the chief of police that they already had plenty of light and the performance would go on. This made

a hit with the audience and the clown was able to keep them satisfied till more candles arrived so that they could at least see part of the performance.

At that time Ed Tracey of this city was the chief of police and he and Al G. Fields from that time on became fast friends. It was for many years that Mr. Tracey, even times during the season, would get a letter from him even after he had got to be famous in the minstrel business. Mr. Tracey shortly after left Sioux Falls and went to Chicago and joined the Pinkerton forces, where he remained some three or four years. During this time he made the acquaintance of many showmen whom he met at different times. Among them was

Montgomery Queen, at that time owner and manager of one of the finest shows on the road.

Al G. Fields, "King of the Minstrel Shows." Pfening Archives.



Although Mr. Orton is more than three score years and ten, he is still in the business and somewhere in the western country this season running a small but high class show.

Of all places to study human nature I think that the ticket wagon of a circus is the one. Here you meet all classes of people in all walks of life. It's here that all the bills are paid so that you meet hundreds of them every day in a business way. For an hour there in the afternoon and the same time in the evening your work has to be done in a hurry, as you have to get hundreds of people into the show in an hour.

Milwaukee was one of the hardest towns to sell tickets in I ever saw. This is on account of the large German population and they are naturally slow and deliberate about their business. Invariably if the head of the family got into the crowd to buy tickets he had neglected to count noses and did not know whether he wanted seven or twelve tickets. St. Louis was the next in line and this was due to the same cause. There

would be many days that nearly, if not quite, six thousand tickets would have to be passed out of the ticket office in one hour.

One season we had fifty-six Indians with the show. All these were government subjects and came from their reservations in the far west. They had a sleeper of their own with the show and a colored porter to take care of it. One afternoon between the afternoon and evening show the Indians thought they had a grievance with the porter. They commenced to raise a row and the porter was not long in finding out that there was trouble brewing. He was out on the railroad track keeping an eye on them, but finally twenty of them made a dash for him and the colored boy started down the track with a good lead between him and the Indians.

For a colored boy to outrun an Indian was among the impossibilities. They had not gone far when the colored boy looked around and saw they were gaining on him and he pulled a seven shooter from his pocket and commenced firing on them when they were not more than fifty or sixty feet away. Along in the early sixties Uncle Sam had taught the Indians to look for smoke, especially if it was made by powder. The Indians all turned and ran just as fast for cover in their sleeper as they had been running after the colored boy, but the darky never looked back. He went down the railroad track a-flying and this was one porter that we never heard from after that.

While showing in the western country many times we would show near some Indian reservation and they would come to the show by the hundreds. They were like most people. They would make arrangements to go to the circus regardless of their coal for the winter or their ice for the summer.

There was one thing that a clown could not do and that was to bring a smile on the face of an Indian. I don't think twenty of the best clowns in the world could get one smile out of a bunch of five hundred Indians. While they were interested in everything they saw, there would be no signs of approval on their countenances and as soon as the afternoon show was

closed they would quietly walk outside the tent and sit down on the grass and talk it over between themselves. The minute the show would open for the evening they were right back into the show again and would never leave the grounds at night until the last wagon had left for the train. I once heard Billie Burke say that smiles on an Indian's face were as scarce as feathers on a frog. But they were invariably good patrons for the circus and whenever we showed near a reservation we could always count on them being there, for they would not even leave one to keep the campfire alive.

The Indians were paid every Saturday, each one getting his own money while a few of the older ones gave their money to the interpreter. As a rule the younger ones cared for their own and spent it as they went along, many of them being broke before salary day came around again.

During the engagement of the Ringling show at the Coliseum in Chicago for fifteen days they took more money than they ever took in fifteen days in their history. Buffalo Bill's show in Madison Square Garden is playing to enormous business. The Gollmar Brothers will close an engagement in Milwaukee at the Amphitheatre there tonight where they have given twelve performances to big business and will take to tents Monday. The Barnum show is in Connecticut showing to big business; the Ringlings were in Washington D.C., last Monday and Tuesday and will be in Baltimore, Maryland, next week Monday and Tuesday; the Hagenbeck-Wallace show is in Indiana playing to big business and although damaged many thousands of dollars by the flood, the newspapers say that the show will be bigger, brighter and better than ever before, so it certainly takes some flood to put a circus and menagerie out of business. As for Janesville, we are likely to get both the Ringling and the Buffalo Bill shows here some time during the summer.

May 10, 1913

In the spring of '79 a young man by the name of George K. Steele



Burr Robbins letterhead used in the 1870s. Circus World Museum collection.

arrived in Janesville to take the position of advance agent for the Burr Robbins show. Mr. Steele was born in Moundsville, West Virginia, which is about twenty miles below Wheeling. He had been a advance of one or two different shows before coming to Janesville and had shown himself to be more than an ordinary man in the business. His outfit for the advance work of the Burr Robbins show consisted that season of a horse and carriage which he drove himself and a large bill wagon with two bill posters. These bill posters at Mr. Steele's direction would bill barns and tobacco sheds along the road between towns we were to show in. After arriving in a town where we were to exhibit, they would erect new billboards which they would cover and many times they would get their work done early and start for the next town the same day. In those days it took only three or four men and that many horses with two wagons to do the entire advance work of the wagon show.

Mr. Steele was thorough in his work and never left a town until the last contract was closed and as he was at all times a thorough southern gentleman, he would always leave the people in a town with whom he had done business with the impression that if the balance of the show was like the advance part, they would be only too glad to have them come.

Mr. Steele remained with the Burr Robbins show some three or four years. But for some time the proprietors of the larger shows had their eyes on him and in '79 or '80 Adam Forepaugh made Mr. Steele a tempting offer to act as advance for the great Forepaugh show. It was through George K. Steele in the early

part of eighteen hundred and eighty-two that I also left the Burr Robbins show and went to the Forepaugh. All the time that Mr. Steele was with the Adam Forepaugh show Burr Robbins was trying to make more arrangements to have him come back and head his show once more.

Mr. Steele always worked for his employer's interest, would work early and late, and while expenses were all paid, he was as careful to keep them down as though he were paying them out of his own pocket. I once met Mr. Steele in Chicago and asked him where he was stopping. He said, "I am stopping at the old Commercial Hotel." This was an old time hotel run on the American plan. Three times a day the landlord or the clerk would come out in front and pound on one of the old fashioned gongs such as they used to have fifty years ago. I asked Mr. Steele why he did not go to the Palmer House or the Sherman as they were up to date and the best hotels in Chicago at that time. "Well, Dave," he said, "You know I was raised in Moundsville, West Virginia, and only in the next block was a little old country hotel and the landlord three times a day would step out in front of the hotel and pound on a gong announcing that breakfast, dinner or supper was ready. Do you know that when I was a boy I got so used to it that even in the large cities I think I have to hear it or I could not get hungry."

Mr. Steele remained with the Burr Robbins show until it was sold to Tom Grenier of Chicago. He then retired from the business and for some years made his home in a small town out in Iowa, but a few years ago moved back to Moundsville, West Virginia, where he is still living.

Adam Forepaugh never had an advance man ahead of his show that suited him as did George K. Steele, and had he not been offered an interest in the Burr Robbins show, he would probably have remained there until Mr. Forepaugh's death. Had all the officials with the different shows set the high standard in the business that George K. Steele did, it would have had much influence in raising

the standard of the shows. During his stay in Janesville, he made many warm friends, many of whom remember him to this day.

In eighteen hundred and eighty five we were showing in Peru, Indiana, on a Friday. The parade was out in the morning and Mr. Forepaugh and I were sitting in the shade of the ticket wagon where I said to him, "Mr. Forepaugh, if I could take a train and go to Chicago, I think I could get permission to open the side show on the lakefront on Sunday." He said he thought it was a good idea and about that time a hackman drove up and Mr. Forepaugh asked him what time I could get a train to Chicago. The hackman said there was one leaving there in about thirty minutes. He said to me, "Put some money in your pocket and go to Chicago and see if you can have matters fixed up to open the side show there on Sunday." In a few minutes I was on my way to the train.

That season he had brought an Austrian over from the old country whose name was Vienna. He came as a strong man and certainly filled the bill. His name was George Jagendorff, and it was his business every afternoon and evening to lift a horse in the menagerie and also hold large dumbbells and other heavy weights in the big ring. George Jagendorff got a salary and while he was very strong of body and limb, he was a little weak in the head. He knew all about this country and every other one, and he also knew that the banks were failing every little while, and the only place to keep his money and diamonds was in a heavy old fashioned trunk in the dressing room.

The show had only been out four or five weeks when somebody hit his trunk with a sledgehammer and his diamonds and about \$700 in money were gone. Mr. Forepaugh went to him and told him the only way for him to do was to draw his money on salary day, put it

in a large envelope and hand it to me, and I would be there anytime he wanted it. This he did for some weeks, and at the time I left Peru on Friday to go to Chicago, I had \$1,400 of his money in the safe.

Jagendorff was in the parade and when they came back he thought he would take a few hundred dollars and send it home to Vienna. He came to the ticket wagon, could not find me, and asked Mr. Forepaugh where I was. Mr. Forepaugh threw up his hands and said, "That's what I'd like to know. He has not been seen since last night, and when we came to open the safe this morning, I found that he had taken \$30,000 of my money and skipped out."

Jagendorff said, "Oh Dear! Mr. Forepaugh, he may have \$1,400 of my money too." Mr. Forepaugh sent word back to the dressing room so that everybody carried out the joke and left the poor Austrian worrying till the show got to Chicago.

I got up early Sunday morning and walked over to the lakefront, not knowing about the joke, and although it was shortly after daylight, the Austrian was the first man I met. He said, "Oh! Mr. Watt, are you coming back; I like my money." I knew nothing of the joke so I said to him that his money was in the ticket wagon and that I would get it for him as soon as it was run onto the lot. "Then you not go away to stay?" he said. "No, I just came on to Chicago to do a little business for Mr. Forepaugh." "Oh," he said, "That man

worry me to death. I sleep not Friday nor Saturday. He tell me you take \$30,000 of his money and my \$1,400 and skip out."

As soon as the ticket wagon was run onto the grounds I got in and unlocked the safe and handed him a his money and he never stopped to thank me and I never

acted as his banker after that. He would draw his salary every payday

and send it direct to Vienna. He seemed to be afraid that the joke might come true. His father was a manufacturer of meerschaum goods in Vienna, and I have two very fine specimens of his work which the son brought me the next season, one being a picture of the ticket wagon with the crowds around it all worked out of a solid block of meerschaum.

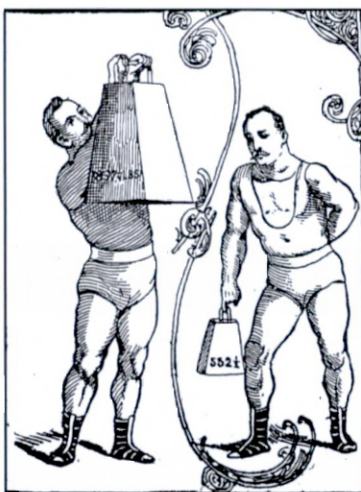
Nothing seemed to please Adam Forepaugh more than a joke of this kind on anyone connected with the show, but the great show that he got together and the great name that it took him a lifetime to put before the people is all gone and in all probability will never be revived again.

May 17, 1913

Only a few days ago I was stopped on the street by a lady who assured me that her family had read my show articles every Saturday night and that they were most interesting. She said one of the first things that the boys and girls would ask for would be for the father to read all about the show business. "But," she said, "I'd like to have you tell me, were all these successful showmen bachelors or widowers? I should think especially at just this time it would be a good thing for you to tell us something about the wives of these men and what part they took in the business if any." I assured her that later I would tell her something about these women and what they did while on the road.

Of course the first one I knew in the business was Mrs. Burr Robbins. She was one of the best business women that I ever knew and every afternoon and evening you would find her taking tickets at the main entrance to the big show. After the show was over, or at least after the people had gotten into the show, Mrs. Robbins would immediately go to work and count up the house. In all the years I was with Burr Robbins, Mrs. Robbins was always on duty and put in more hours a year around with the show than did Mr. Robbins himself, for the reason that his duties would occasionally call him away from the show while she was there and looked after the interests.

Many times during the week performers and working people would



get broke and want to borrow a few dollars till salary day, and many times they would think to themselves that they had bothered me often enough and would not call on me again, but would go to Mr. Robbins where they knew they could always borrow a little money until payday. She carried a little day book in her satchel and would always charge it to them. The first thing they would do on receiving their salary would be to pay their little debt to Mrs. Robbins.

Many a time when Mr. Robbins would have some grievance or difficulty with a performer or working man and they could not agree and sometimes harsh words would be said, after it was over Mrs. Robbins was always there to make peace and smooth things over and did it in a way that would leave the impression with them that she was their friend. Many times both winter and summer Mrs. Robbins looked after the welfare of many an old timer that stayed with them the year round.

I was next with the Adam Forepaugh show in eighteen hundred and eighty-two and the first Mrs. Forepaugh had died many years before this so that the first two years of my work there, Mr. Forepaugh was a widower. In the summer of eighty four he married his second wife who, by the way, was an old neighbor and friend of the family in Philadelphia and much younger than Mr. Forepaugh. The new Mrs. Forepaugh joined the show immediately and was one of the best balances that I ever knew around any business institution.

She was not long in winning the love and esteem of everyone connected with the show. Whenever any man or woman around the show was injured in any way or if they happened to be killed, Mrs. Forepaugh was one of the first to find out what she could do to help them. She always occupied an easy chair at the main entrance of the show with Mr. Forepaugh and after the crowds had all gotten into the show, the ticket boxes would be sent to the wagon and Mr. and Mrs. Forepaugh would count the afternoon or evening receipts as the case might be. These were all charged up to me and I had to make

good for everything taken in at the main entrance. While Mr. Forepaugh died many years ago, Mrs. Forepaugh is still living in a fine residence in Philadelphia and also has a summer home at Atlantic City.

After Mr. Forepaugh's death the show was purchased by the Barnum show, James A. Bailey and James E. Cooper being the purchasers.

James E. Cooper with his family came on to Philadelphia and took charge of the show. Mr. Cooper had a private car, one of the best that I ever saw, and his wife and family were always with the show. The family consisted of two boys and a girl, and while none of them ever took any active part in the show, except Mr. Cooper himself, they were always there, had their own private car and lived in it from spring to fall.

James [Joseph] T. McCaddon, a young man and the youngest brother of Mrs. James A. Bailey, was the acting manager and he, too, had his wife with him. They also had a private car of their own. So you can readily see that the wives of these showmen, while some of them were not so prominent in the business, their influence over the people of all kinds around the show was more than the ordinary person could imagine.

As for Mr. and Mrs. James A. Bailey, while I never traveled with them, I knew them very well and they were always to be found together. They never had any children, but for all their years in the show business, they traveled in their private car which was practically their home for about eight months in the year. Many years ago Mr. Bailey built a beautiful home on the Hudson river and it was there that they spent their time during the winter months. The last time the Barnum show was here I had a long visit with Mr. Bailey and I said to him, "You've got all the money that one man should have and as you are now seventy years of age, I should think you'd go out of the business."

He said, "It is not at all likely that I will ever quit the show business. I think I'm better satisfied here than I would be out of it." This was only

about six months before he died, which was in April the following year while his great show was going on in Madison Square Garden.

Many of the older residents in Janesville will recollect John Dillon, the comedian who was a great acrobat in Janesville more than forty years ago. Mr. Dillon was high class

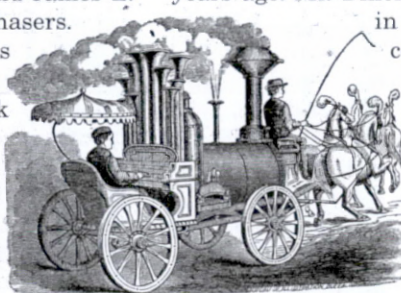
in his work and could draw a large house all over the country. He died on the 21st day of last month at the home of his daughter on the south side

in Chicago at the ripe old age of 81. Mr. Dillon only retired personally from the stage a few years ago and has since been living with his daughter in Chicago.

May 24, 1913

Last Tuesday morning while standing in front of the Myers House the bus backed up at the main entrance of the hotel and four or five gentlemen alighted. One of them came over and grasped me by the hand and called me by name and said that he was awfully glad to see me but he could see in a minute that I did not recognize him and he said, "Dave, don't you know me?" I said, "No," and apologized for my bad eyesight. "Well," he said, "This is a good joke on me. Is it possible that I have come all the way from New York to visit a man who does not know me?" He said, "When I was with the show I was on the payroll as John D. Hill, but everybody around the show called me Jack." But as I had not seen Jack Hill for twenty-five years and as at that time he was quite a youngster, for a moment I could not place him.

Jack Hill's home was in Fort Scott, Kansas, and it was there that he spent his early life and got his education in the high school. Jack was a newspaperman in Fort Scott. In the winter of '86 he made application to Adam Forepaugh for a position with the show as newspaper contracting agent and came on to Philadelphia to take his position with the show early in April.



Jack's work was that of newspaper contracting agent and was on the third car which was ten days ahead of the show so that his work kept him ahead of the show practically all the time, and little was seen of Jack Hill back with the show.

In eighteen and eighty-seven which was his second year with the show, we went west and along about the middle of the season we were billed to show in Fort Scott, Kansas, Jack's home. He wrote to Mr. Forepaugh saying that when the show exhibited in Fort Scott he would like to come back and spend the day with his people. Mr. Forepaugh readily consented to his coming and looking up his friends in Fort Scott, for it might be that we never would be that way again.

Millie Turnour a balancing trapeze performer with the Forepaugh show. Pfening Archives.



Jack was in Fort Scott to meet us early in the morning when we arrived and as Mr. Forepaugh had given him unlimited use of complimentary tickets for his friends, Jack set out and entertained them royally. He picked out some seats up pretty well toward the top for his father, mother, brothers and sisters and then selected three seats for his best girl, three of her friends and himself. These were only three tiers from the bottom seats so that they were close to the ringside.

Shortly after the performance had commenced, a young man rushed out of the dressing room whom Jack had never seen before and stepped up to him and asked him if his name was Hill. When Jack assured him it was, he said, "Your wife would like to see you in the dressing room." His best girl and her friends grew red in the face as well as Jack himself, but he told them it was a joke that was put up on him and there was nothing in it. But Jack had been gone from Fort Scott for two years and the girls seemed to be a little suspicious.

Shortly after he had explained matters, as he supposed in a satisfactory manner, a young lady by the name of Millie Turnour, who was a balancing trapeze performer with the show, rushed over to the reserved seats with a scowl on her face and said, "You, Jack Hill, come back in the dressing room and take care of the baby. Don't you know that my act comes on in a few minutes?" and turned and away she went.

Then Jack was up against it in good shape. The more he tried to explain matters the worse it got and Jack, in speaking of it last Tuesday, said, "Well, if I had stayed with the show until this time and it had

showed in Fort Scott, Kansas, every year, I would not have been there, for the trip I did make there cost me my best girl and the friendship of the three girls that she had with her."

Jack Hill stayed with the show for three years and then secured a fine position on the *Washington Post* and later went to the *Washington Republic*

where he remained some time. He was then with the Ringling show for three years and then went to New York City where he represented different theatrical attractions, remaining there until 1902. He then went with the press bureau as a representative of the Standard Oil Company which position he still holds.

Mr. Hill and his wife are now visiting friends in Monroe, Wisconsin, and later will occupy a cottage near Minneapolis at one of the resort lakes in Minnesota. He has a leave of absence of four months and it goes without saying that John D. Hill is one man that started in show business who certainly has made good.

And last Tuesday was certainly an interesting and busy day for us both for we turned back many a page in history and visiting over the good old times of more than twenty-five years ago. When Jack bade me goodbye to take the evening train for Monroe, he

assured me if it was possible for him to get one more day off, he would come back and we would finish up. Jack Hill is one of the kind of friends that you are always glad to meet and to introduce to others as your friend.

In eighteen and seventy-nine when the Burr Robbins show was going by wagon, we were showing in a small town in southern Illinois and the drive to the next town was twenty-five miles. On a trip of this kind the breakfast at the cook tent on the showgrounds was at one o'clock and at the hotel for the performers and other people was at three. I had a good pair of road horses that could always make ten miles an hour or more, for I had to be the last one out of town in the morning and the first one into the next.

In this particular town in going out I drove by the showground and as it had just commenced to show daylight, I looked over in the vacant lot where we had showed the day before and thought I could see something on the lot. I pulled in on the grounds and here I found Richard Brooks, better known here as "Sailor Dick" who was the boss animal man and had in his charge the two elephants. Dick rode on horseback and drove the elephants ahead, but he had overslept and was two hours behind the baggage and cage wagons.

I woke him up and told him that he must get to the next town as fast as possible as Mr. Robbins would be along in less than an hour and a half, and well Dick knew that this meant a severe calling down if it did not cost him his position. That was where the elephants had to do their work. Most people would naturally think that an elephant could not travel twelve miles an hour, but "Sailor Dick" was but a few minutes over two hours making those twenty-five miles and his favorite salute to the two elephants was to "mile up."

I drove the twenty-five miles in a little over two hours and I had not been on the grounds ten minutes when "Sailor Dick" came in with his two elephants and Burr Robbins never found out that he was two hours late in leaving the lot. These were the days when many hardships had to be encountered by the wagon shows of the good old days.

Circulation 2,000,000.

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